CONTROL OF THE CURRICULUM AND THE COMPETENCE OF TEACHERS

by

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Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctorate of Philosophy

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January 1980

Abstract

The question of who ought to have control of the curriculum was a dormant issue poked alive by a succession educational ideologues, government commissions and concerned segments of the public, since the 1960s. For the free school movement, community education movement, Plowden Report, Great Debate and Taylor Report each had recommendations for who ought to determine the aims, content and methods of curriculum - an issue that in earlier days had been of rather less concern than the matter of what ought to be on the curriculum.

The most frequently supported contenders for control of the curriculum are students, parents, the teaching profession, educational experts, the state or some form of participatory arrangement that would include some or all of these. What is of particular interest to the philosopher in this are the lines of justification that can be offered for these potential decision-makers. There are, of course, different sorts of argument, for example moral and political justifications. But fundamental is the issue of competence. If we are concerned about the quality of education we provide children, we must know who is the most competent to determine curriculum.

This thesis considers the question 'Who is most competent to control the curriculum?', and in doing so takes, one by one, the various potential decision-makers and considers from the point of view of competence the case that can be made in their favour. This is facilitated by an analysis of the concept of competence and the nature of knowledge required by a curriculum decision-maker. The position taken in the thesis is that, all things considered, the teaching profession is more likely to be competent than the other alternatives. Consequently, curriculum, for most part, ought to be left in the hands of the teaching profession.

Acknowledgements

Professor R.S. Peters helped me enormously in the preparation of this thesis and for that I wish to thank him. Of help in countless other ways was my wife Mim. She sustained me.

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Chapter I

CONTROL OF THE CURRICULUM

1. Introduction

The question to be answered is 'Who is most competent to determine curriculum?'. This is a part of the larger matter of curriculum control - only a 'part' because competence is not the sole grounds upon which the case for entitlement might reasonably be made. However, as I will endeavour to show presently and throughout the thesis, the larger question is very complex and could not be satisfactorily dealt with in a single thesis, and in any case the issue of competence is of central importance as a philosophical concern and perhaps even of greater importance to the practical difficulty we, in Western industrialized nations, seem now to have with regard to control of curriculum.

'Control' or 'determination' in curriculum matters can be manifest in a great many ways. It can be formal control such as a government might have to dictate to schools the details of the syllabus; it could be informal influence such as an authority on curriculum matters might have over policy makers in government; or it can be indirect control such as book publishers, external examiners and university entrance requirements have, insofar as each restricts what is taught. There are other ways of course, and this will be mentioned throughout the chapters to follow. Our main concern, though, is with the matters of formal entitlement to set curriculum.

The question of who ought to have control of the curriculum seems to have reached the British public rather dramatically and in consequence of the Great Debate and subsequent report of the Taylor Commission on school government of 1976-7. However, the matter of curriculum control is anything but new, and the recommendations of a proper controller are greatly varied.[1] Taylor, for instance, abhorred the autonomy of the school, that is to say curriculum control by the school head and staff, and recommended that some combination of parents, members of the community and even students ought to join with teachers in decision-making. Yet only a decade before the Plowdon Report made recommendations for the

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[1] For a good synoptic view of this see Tim Devlin and Mary Warnock, What Must We Teach?(London: Temple Smith, 1977), Chapter One explains the British situation with regard to curriculum control for the last century. Chapter two gives a comparative view throughout Europe and North America as things are today.

junior schools which were very much in the 'progressive' spirit of the 1920s and 30s. That is, it emphasised the part that children should play in determining what it is they want to learn. The early progressives, though differing among themselves, at least gave the impression that they felt children ought to determine their own curriculum for the most part. Dewey, for instance, was never very clear about how much 'leadership'[2], hence decision-making, should be in the province of the teacher; but it was the same international progressive movement that he helped to sustain, despite his criticisms of it, that spawned Homer Lane[3] and after him A.S. Neill[4], both of whom were quite clearly in favour of child freedom - in Neill's case even to the extreme in saying that children should not only decide what to study, when and how, but whether or not to study anything. Ironically, Neill, an Englishman, probably had greater impact in North America, and perhaps Australia, than in Britain.[5] The freeschooling movement of the 1960s very much supported, and with a good deal of popular as well as academic backing, the notion that children ought to be self-determinate in curriculum. Though a portion of the argument in North America was moral and political, there was still much agreement over the belief that children ought to decide on the basis of felt-interests and self-assessed needs, and in these matters they were supposed to be more competent than teachers, parents or any others.

The dispute about curriculum control in Britain has, in recent years, been a revolt against the authority of the teaching profession and the individual school; and this has been reflected in the current debates and Taylor's recommendation of community involvement. For the progressives of the 1920s and 30s, the fight was rather more against control by the government.[6] In America, control of curriculum has been

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[2]See Experience and Education (1938) (New York: Collier Books, 1963), p. 59.

[3]For an introduction to Lane's Views see Talks to Parents and Teachers (1928) (New York: Schocken Books, 1969).

[4]See Summerhill (London: Pelican Books, 1968).

[5]This was evidenced by the enormous outpouring of freeschool literature in North America during the 1960s from such people as Holt, Kozol, Kohl, Silberman and many others who, in their books and articles, mentioned with gratitude the writings and practical achievements of Neill.

[6]According to Devlin and Warnock, op. cit., pp. 2-8, the 1944 Education Act opened control of curriculum to the local authorities and, as a matter of practice, to the schools, hence to teachers. Prior to that, syllabus details were regulated by government through a series of policy suggestions and regulations in 1904, 1926 and 1933.

traditionally denied the teaching profession and certainly denied to individual schools in favour of centralized governmental control. (In the United States control is with each state and in Canada, each province). So, in America, progressives who were not enthusiastic about complete child control were, in any case, in favour of more autonomy for the teacher - autonomy that would allow the teacher to lead or guide the student toward fulfillment of his, the student's, needs. Again the grounds would be competence. The trained professional would, better than others, know how to determine the needs and interests of the children and to utilize them in curriculum choices.[7]

More recently in North America, and to some extent Europe (to judge from the enormous amount of discussion following the Taylor Report), the notion that the community should have considerable say in curriculum, or even have direct control of it, has been gaining in popularity. In the past five years a considerable literature, most of it not very erudite, has grown up around the rather vague notion of 'community education'. Its main principles are difficult to pin down because they are usually neither clearly expressed nor uniform throughout the movement. Very generally, though, a coherent position seems to have emerged (from the modern day version of this ancient concept).[8] In order to bring the school and the community closer together so as to allow the community to utilize the school's facilities (e.g. classrooms and sports facilities) and as well to make the school sensitive and responsive to the needs of the community (i.e. in terms of community services it could provide, e.g. daycare and assistance programmes in local hospitals, and courses to suit the community's commercial needs, e.g. business oriented curriculum in an industrial area and earth science and agronomy in agricultural regions) it is suggested that parents and members of the community ought to have a role in decision-making.[9] The nature and scope of this role varies. Some argue that the community ought to have a participatory role, perhaps something along the lines suggested by Taylor. Others support outright community control such that the teachers become employees of the community and do

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[7]Dewey's position was much like this. See Experience and Education, op. cit., Chapters 4, 5, and 6.

[8]Two unusually good sources on this are Cyril Poster, The School and the Community (London: Macmillan, 1971) and the contributions to School and Community, O.E.C.D., Paris: Centre for Educational Research and Innovation, 1975). A more substantial listing of sources will be given in Chapter IX.

[9]See Stuart Maclure's introduction in School and Community, op. cit.

their bidding.[10] As for the scope of involvement, it ranges from non curriculum matters, such as the school budget, uniforms and boys' hair length, to determination of the curriculum itself - what is to be taught, when and how. On what grounds? Again, there are political arguments. The community could be said to have a legitimate interest in the schools, given that the community benefits, or does not, as the case may be, in consequence of the sort of training and instruction students are given; so, this, not to mention the financial interest the community has in the schools, seems prima facie to entitle the community to some degree of input into the decisions of schooling.[11] Now I will say something about the complexity of these sorts of problems later. For now, though, I want to point out that a very large portion of the argument, and a very convincing portion in favour of participation and control, is on the basis of competence. The point is, roughly, that a greater breadth and depth of information pertinent to curriculum decisions, and perhaps even more efficient decision-making, is consequent of collective decision-making by some assemblage of teachers, parents and ordinary members of the public (usually from the local community).[12]

Sometimes the community education position has a different, or perhaps additional, twist. For in some schools parents are invited into the classroom to give optional courses to students or to act as teacher aids.[13] In such cases parents are directly involved in decisions about curriculum - sometimes more, sometimes less. And, as 'community education' shades into 'alternative education', that is to say, into schools in which groups of parents organize themselves (perhaps because they have some common political, religious or cultural interest in common), the decision-making role can be one of control, and, as regards scope, for all curriculum matters. In other words, like-minded parents might themselves form a school whose curriculum and manner of execution they determine. They may hire teachers to carry out the directives and they may do some of the teaching themselves.[14] How justified? Well, on the one hand, there are moral considerations such as the alleged parent's

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[10]This is most common with religious and political extremists.

[11]See Charlotte Ryan, The Open Partnership (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976). Especially Chapter Two.

[12]Ibid.

[13]See for example Jonathan Kozol, Free Schools (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972).

[14]Maclure, op. cit., p. 13.

natural right to determine the activities of his or her child. On the other hand, there is the argument from competence. For it is often claimed (sometimes even in support of moral claim to parental authority) that a parent, in virtue of the intimate relations he has with the child, is more competent than the teacher, expert or any other to determine the needs, interests and most desirable means of satisfaction of them for his or her own child. Alternatively, a group of parents whose children allegedly have a need in common might make this claim collectively. For example, parents of exceptionally bright children might claim that as a group they know what is best for their children (collectively). In addition, parents (and community members too) of an interest group, e.g. cultural or religious, sometimes suppose that they are more competent than others to assess and accommodate the interests of their group. Insofar as the schools (local schools) are seen to have important consequences for the interests (e.g. promulgation of beliefs) of the group, it is usually felt that the group is correspondingly most competent to determine what happens in the school.[15]

There has long been the feeling in North America, and there are many in Britain who would share the feeling, that matters of curriculum content and instruction ought to be in the hands of our best approximations to the philosopher-kings, namely educational experts. The point is, if it is important that in curriculum matters we get things right, then the most competent decision-makers ought to be enlisted. One contender for this title would be the like of curriculum experts in university departments of education, government or private research corporations. In many countries, of which both Canada and the United States would be examples, curriculum is centrally determined (at the state level in the U.S. and provincial level in Canada) by groups of experts who may be drawn from universities, the teaching profession and other sectors of society to make plans for the entire area within their jurisdiction (i.e. state or province). Now it is not hard to imagine other configurations of academics and so forth who might be called experts (e.g. the Schools Council in Britain) and who could on grounds of competence claim title to determine the curriculum. Against this claim there could be raised moral or political objections - objections that would stem from the positive claims to authority by, for example, parents or the community. But a prior concern, and one that will be of central

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[15]Militant Blacks' feminists, Quebec separatists and sundry religious sects (e.g. Amish, Mennonities and Hutterites) frequently take this view. This will be discussed further in Chapter VIII.

importance for us, is whether or not these experts are indeed the most competent alternatives we have available. Are they more competent than students and parents, given the concern about felt-interests and needs? Are they more competent than some form of collective arrangement which might even include experts among their number?

In this thesis it will be my intention to show that on grounds of competence the teaching profession rather than the other alternatives we have been discussing ought to have control of most, though not all, curriculum decisions. Of course, precisely what we mean by the 'teaching profession', i.e. whether the profession as a whole, individual classroom teachers, or the teachers in a school or region, and which decisions they are competent to make, are matters we must deal with. But, those discussions will be postponed until we come to make the arguments for teachers. However, there are some preliminaries yet. For instance, I want to say a bit more about why competence is to be our dominant concern; what is to be meant by the phrase curriculum decision, which to this point has been so cavalierly tossed around; and, most important, I want to explain something about the approach to be taken in the demonstration of competence.

2. Curriculum Control and Competence

It would be a great mistake to think that the only important consideration in determining who ought to have control of the curriculum is competence. For there are a great many problems, which I alluded to earlier in several places, of politics and ethics. Just to remind, one could say that if control of curriculum is to be granted to, say, teachers, then an ethical matter arises in regard to the personal freedom of students that is thereby at a tension. Paternal rights, the right of the parent to determine what shall be done with their children, might thus be violated.[16] And what about the community? Since they support (financially) the schools through taxation and have an interest in the knowledge, understanding, practical skills and social and moral development of those who are educated - in the new generation that will soon determine the 'good life', it seems at least reasonable to claim that they have a right to a say in curriculum? Then, of course, the ethical questions shade into political questions about, for example, democracy.

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[16]Moral rights to paternal control have been variously claimed by Aquinas, Hobbes and Locke. A very useful essay in the topic of paternal rights is Francis Schrag, 'The Right to Educate', School Review, May 1971, pp. 359-378.

One could reasonably take the view that classrooms ought to be participant democracies even in the choice of what is to be learned. Or it could be suggested that the state ought to control all or part of the curriculum. For it may be claimed that what is learned in schools affects the way in which the new generation sees the 'good life'; and, since the entire society will evolve in accordance with this as the new generation assumes control of government, industry, the media and academe, hence the 'good society' as they see it will emerge; it follows that the society, through their democratic agents, namely the government, ought to have the determining say in curriculum - in view of the fact that they are to be so profoundly affected.[17]

Apart from ethical and political problems that directly bear on the question 'Who ought to control curriculum?', there is another set of ethical questions, questions on a different footing because they seem to be prior to the question about curriculum control. That is, control of the curriculum more or less assumes that there ought to be a curriculum in the first place. This gives rise to whether or not children have a moral right to an education. If so, and if this right requires a positive performance on the part of someone else, that is to say, a duty to provide that education, then on whom does this duty fall - who is morally obliged to provide an education to children?

Each of these issues is highly complex. If children have a right to be free and hence to determine their own curricula, or if parents have rights to direct the actions of their children and against outside interference with this, or if communities have rights or children have a right to education, then what kind of rights are they and what sort of justifications can be offered? For example, is the right to education a natural right? Is it a moral right supported by some further moral principles such as a respect for persons? Is it a welfare right?[18] And, if there are political questions about democracy then conceptual

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[17] See John White, 'Teacher Accountability and School Autonomy' in Proceedings of the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain, Vol. X, July 1976, pp. 58-78; and my reply 'John White on State Control of the Curriculum', Journal of Philosophy of Education, Vol. 12, 1978, pp. 63-8.

[18] For two interesting debates in which these issues are raised see I.M.M. Gregory, 'The Right to Education' and C.A. Wringe 'Pupils' Rights' both in Proceedings of the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain, Vol. VII, No. 1, 1973 and Fredrick A. Olafson 'Rights and Duties in Education' and A.I. Melden 'Olafson on the Right to Education' both in James F. Doyle ed., Educational Judgments (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973).

problems arise about the meaning of democracy; and then there is the matter of justification.[19] Plainly, the moral and political considerations are themselves worthy of a thesis - probably more than one. It would, therefore, be a great injustice and of little philosophical value to cram them into a thesis which is primarily concerned with competence. In consequence, I will not deal with these matters; not, obviously, because they are unimportant, but rather because they are too important to be given short shrift.

Why, then, should the matter of competence be taken so seriously? Perhaps the point from which to start in a demonstration of this is one of the ethical matters, namely the child's right to an education. As I said before, it is a nice philosophical question to determine the moral status and justification of such a right (alleged right). But, whether or not it is a genuine moral right in advanced industrialized nations, those with which this thesis is concerned, there are legal rights to education; indeed there are strictures requiring that children go to school and remain in school almost to the point where secondary school is completed. (Usually the age of compulsory schooling is sixteen.) And, there are corresponding duties of positive performance on the part of parents that they should ensure regular attendance and provide children with the necessary clothing, pens, pencils and so forth; and it is incumbent upon the state to provide for adequate schools, teachers and other necessary facilities. Not only are these rights and duties matters of law but they are generally seen to be morally required and of absolute practical necessity. That children ought (whether morally or legally ought is unimportant here) to have an education and that society is bound to provide it, are not matters in dispute either by the general public or educational theorists (most especially philosophers). This is not, of course, to say that there is no objection. Some individuals and minority groups are totally opposed to education or anything that does more than provide skill training. However, these views are not widely accepted. For it is commonly seen that twentieth century life requires an education. It is no longer just a matter of children learning to read and write, as might have been adequate (at a minimum) in the early part of the twentieth century. Nor is education seen as properly concerned solely with a study of the disciplines for nothing more than their own intrinsic value. The world has become too

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[19] See for example, P. Scrimshaw, 'Should Schools be Participant Democracies?' in D. Bridges and P. Scrimshaw Values and Authority in Schools (London: Hodder and Straughton, 1975).

complex for this. Societies need citizens with particular skills. Someone has to fix the drains, staff the hospitals and schools, discover new sources of energy, determine how best to handle the economy so that needed products are provided and masses of people are not put out of work, deal with world economy problems in an age when national economies are so interrelated that a slowdown in the production of something in one country can put thousands out of work in another (e.g. production of oil), understand domestic and world political matters well enough to participate in the activities directly or elect or appoint others to handle them. And there is much else besides. Societies need people of skill, expertise and good judgment. Individuals in society need these qualities to contribute to the society, and they need sufficient knowledge and understanding to make the best of the activities, opportunities and resources of their society. They need education for work and for leisure. Thus construed, education is widely believed to be vital for both the individual and society as a whole. Accordingly, it is felt by all but a very small minority that children ought to be educated.

The point about competence follows on the heals of this recognized need for an education. It is simply that to provide an education for children which falls short of the best that circumstances will reasonably permit, given the profoundly important consequences of education, would be absurd. It would be logically inconsistent, not to mention foolish from the practical point of view, to recognize the great importance of education on the one hand, and not to deal with it in the most competent manner possible, on the other. Indeed, this seems to be generally recognized by Western nations. Enormous portions of national expenditure go to the provision of schools and institutions to educate teachers and do research into matters pertaining to the improvement of education and teaching. Further evidence of national concerns about the competent running of the schools would surely be the various governmental commissions that investigate school decision-making (e.g. the Plowden and Taylor Reports in Britain) and such public inquiries as the Great Debate.

What I am claiming is that, for the most part, we do in fact think that children ought to have an education and we believe that whoever is to make the arrangements and carry them out ought to be the most competent, given the present state of understanding, technology, availability of relevant materials, availability of individuals (such as teachers) to make the decisions and the relative importance of educational needs to other social needs. (On the latter point, it may be that our <u>most</u> competent performance in educational matters ought to be denied in favour of those decision-makers and resources being needed in another sphere

which is seen as (from a legal and moral point of view) more pressing). And, in consequence of this, it is a very important matter to determine who is likely to be most competent.

As a concluding note: I am not saying that because we do in fact regard education as a moral, practical and legal necessity that we morally ought to. What I am saying is that if there is such a moral right, and since we do think that children ought (morally, practically and legally) to have an education, it follows that we should plan and execute this education in the most competent manner possible, given of course that education is subject to practical limitations of human and material resources and that education (and a right to it) must take its place in society with other social needs and functions (and rights to them). Why is competence implied? It would be logically inconsistent to say that 'X has a right to the best education we can provide, but we are not obliged to do our most competent job in providing it'. And, it would be most unwise from the practical standpoint to recognize the vital importance of education to society and the individual, yet to assign the decision-making function to anyone but the most competent decision-maker available.

3. Curriculum Decisions

We have, so far, used the phrase 'curriculum decision' rather broadly and without explanation, though I think the context and examples have given it a rough definition. In what is to follow, the scope of 'curriculum decision' is to be greater than usual. Normally it applies to matters of content - what is actually taught. However, we will take it to include not only what is taught but why and how. Curriculum decisions, that is, will entail those to do with content and, as well, aims and methods.

Questions about aims, for example, would be the like of 'In schools should we endeavour to make students happy or creative or rational or mentally healthy or culturally sophisticated or simply literate and numerate?' 'Should children be initiated into the various disciplines because they are worthwhile in themselves?' 'Should we try to prepare children for future occupations in the work force?' 'Should we make them virtuous?' 'Should we educate them in such a way that they are well prepared to use their leisure time (given that our unemployment problems may worsen to the point where some people may in their life-time have very little work)?' And, there are many more questions of this sort.

Decisions about content could involve such matters as 'Which of the

disciplines are to be studied?' 'How deeply is each discipline to be gone into?' 'At what ages are students to be introduced to each?' 'What balance is to be struck between, for example, arts and sciences?' 'Is each student to be compelled to study certain things?' 'Is the balance to be the same for all students?' 'Within each discipline what is to be studied?' (For example, if a student is to study history, then which histories? World history, or British history or European history? Should these be social or economic or political histories? What sort of interpretations should be given - Marxist? And within each history, what are to be the syllabus details - i.e. topics?)

About methods one could ask 'What overall approach is to be used in teaching, for example, geography?' 'Is it to be predominantly lecture, discussion, project work, etc.?' 'If project work is to be used, how independently will the students be allowed to work? Will they work individually or in groups?' 'How will the blackboard space be used?' 'Will films be used?' And so on.

It is questions such as these, and of course many more like them, that we want competently dealt with, and which, accordingly, press the need for a competent decision-maker. What logical conditions, then, are we going to propose that we may apply in consideration of the case for each of the candidate curriculum decision-makers - students, parents, educational experts, teachers or some combination of them?

4. The Conditions of Competence and Education as an Activity

How are we to assess competence? To start with, one is not simply competent, one is competent to do something. The 'something' with which we are concerned is decision-making in the spheres of curriculum. What must be done, therefore, is an analysis of decision-making as it pertains to curriculum; and in light of this, a further analysis of competence. To be derived is a set of conditions, conditions of competence in curriculum decision-making, which can be applied in consideration of each of the candidates for curriculum control.

Still, there is something else. If I might anticipate one condition of competence to be worked out in our analysis, it would surely be that a curriculum decision-maker have relevant knowledge. By their very nature, decisions are (among other things) choices among alternatives. One must therefore have a knowledge of the reasonable alternatives. But stated thus, 'knowledge' is a formal condition of competence, i.e. we have not specified that any particular body or area of knowledge be known. This is a problem, given our intention to consider particular

candidates as decision-makers in a particular sphere, namely curriculum. Surely each of the candidates will have some sort of knowledge credentials. But will his knowledge be relevant to curriculum decisions? We would not know unless we gave a substantive account of the knowledge required by a curriculum decision-maker.

I want to deal with the specification of knowledge in two stages. First, 'education', by which I mean formal schooling, will be construed as an activity of a special sort. Activities will be shown to have a characteristic structure, and curriculum decisions will be shown to be activity decisions - decisions that are made within the structure and decisions that are made about the structure (i.e. to change it in some way). Now the point of doing this will be to demonstrate that because the components of structure bear certain relationships to one another; and because the whole structure has certain other relations with the context, or circumstances in which the activity takes place; there are, here, very important implications for the knowledge which a decision-maker must have. Second, in the case of the educational activity, understanding the components of structure and context, and acting (deciding) within and about them, presupposes specifiable areas of knowledge. Consequently, a decision-maker must not only understand the structure and context of the activity in question but must, as well, have an understanding of these areas of knowledge. So, by providing accounts of education as an activity and of the areas of knowledge that are underlying, we are thereby in a position to set out in some detail a substantive knowledge condition of competence which can be used in choosing among the various candidates.

The treatment of education as an activity is not entirely new and some strong objections have been raised to doing so.[20] Nevertheless, I believe the objections can be overcome, and to great advantage. For one thing, it will show the enormous interdependency of elements of curriculum and the equally significant dependency of curriculum upon local circumstances. Both have profound implications for decision-making. There is, of course, much else to be said about the utility of the activity analysis but this will come in due course.

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[20] Glenn Langford has construed education as an activity in 'The Concept of Education' and 'Values in Education (1)', both in Glenn Langford and D.J. O'Connor, eds., New Essays in the Philosophy of Education (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973). R.S. Peters has in many places said that education is not an activity (see, for example, Ethics and Education (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1966) Chapter One); and in 'Values and Education (2)' in Langford and O'Connor, op. cit., he argues directly against Langford on this point. Peters' arguments will be examined in detail in Chapter IV.

5. Plan of the Thesis

The substantive occupation of the thesis is to answer the question 'Who is most competent to determine the curriculum - students, parents, educational experts, teachers or some participatory combination of them?'. The set of conditions for use in evaluating the cases to be made on behalf of each of these candidates will come from two major analyses: an analysis of competence in decision-making and an analysis of education as an activity. The plan to be followed will be this. After the present chapter will be the analysis of competence in decision-making. Then, three chapters will be devoted to 'activities'. The first will analyse and interrelate the concepts of 'activity' and 'context'. The second will argue that education is an activity. The third will re-categorize curriculum decisions as activity decisions and will explain the areas of knowledge that underlie the categories of activity decisions in education. There will, then, be five chapters devoted to assessing the candidates for curriculum control. One chapter each will be given to students and self choice in curriculum, parents as decision-makers, institutional experts and control of curriculum, participatory decision-making, and, finally, teachers as most competent to control most matters of curriculum.

Chapter II

COMPETENCE AND CURRICULUM DECISION-MAKING

1. Introduction

With regard to the making of curriculum decisions, how can we tell if someone is competent? The 'taste-test' would be one way - i.e. observe the results of his decisions. But there has to be more to competence than success. For we would not give that designation to someone who was simply lucky. There has to be something underlying the success, something about the individual himself which accounts for his success. It is the underlying features - attributes, characteristics, or qualities - in virtue of which we say that someone is competent.

Ultimately our objective is to be in a position to choose among competing alternatives the most competent curriculum decision-maker. To do this we need a criterion - a list of empirical credentials which could be applied against each candidate. Still to devise a criterion is to have established an empirical means of assessing competence, but the criterion itself presupposes certain principles or conditions which are constitutive of the meaning of competence. It is these conditions which are of paramount importance to us at the moment, and the object of our attention in this chapter. The matter of criterion will be taken up only after this has been accomplished.

How are we to get started? I think we should begin by looking at the logical composition of 'decision' and 'competence'.

2. Formal Structure of Reasoned Curriculum Decisions

Curriculum decisions are practical choices of action, e.g. should we include, exclude, or modify something in the structure or content of the curriculum? Should we employ this, that, or the other teaching strategy, technique or piece of audio-visual equipment? If reasoned, decisions are expressed in the conclusions of valid argument forms, i.e. are implied by premises; and this is true whether the conclusion is reached from the premises or simply justified by them - the form in either case is the same. The conclusion, moreover, prescribes the action decided upon, e.g. the conclusion that history ought (practically or morally) to be on the curriculum prescribes that it be. Furthermore, the inference from premises to conclusion may be deductive, in which

case the premises logically imply the conclusion, or inductive in which case the conclusion follows, but not as a matter of logical necessity.

Since the conclusions which house decisions (a) prescribe and in so doing (b) select a specific course of action (or range of them), two formal requirements of the premises (which constitute the 'reason' for acting) are: first, a prescriptive statement must appear, or be implied, somewhere among them; and second, there must be a description of the action selected.

So, in terms of formal structure, a reasoned curriculum decision which prescribes an action is expressed in the conclusion of a valid argument structure (whether deductive or inductive) the premises of which include a description of the chosen action and a prescription that it be done. Now this structure is simply a vehicle for assessing the validity of a decision; however, it tells us nothing of the logical character of what we take a decision to be and how we go about making them. If we knew something about this logical character it might give some valuable insight into the epistemic credentials essential to a decision-maker, i.e. what sort of propositional knowledge, intellectual capacities, and pragmatic abilities he would need in dealing with curriculum decisions. Let us consider such a characterization.

3. The Character of Reasoned Curriculum Decisions[1]

(a) The Object-of-Decision

To begin with, a decision is about some issue; each has what I will call an object-of-decision. Our decision to grab the child off the tracks rather than allow it to meet a grisly demise with the arriving train is about, i.e. has the object-of-decision of, 'what should be done about the child on the tracks'. Similarly, a teacher's decision to show slides of art reproductions rather than simply describe the works in an art history class, has the object-of-decision of 'employing whatever method of teaching art history is most suitable under the circumstances.[2]

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[1]This characterization owes a great deal to R.M. Hare's The Language of Morals, (London: O.U.P., 1964) (first published by The Clarendon Press, 1952), Chapter 4; and indirectly to Aristotle (see Nichomachean Ethics, III 3, 1113a-5; VII 3, 1147a) from whose notion of the practical sylogism Hare took the idea for this sort of analysis.

[2]I am after a conceptual point here but is interesting to note

(b) Alternatives

Going on to a second characteristic: if someone is making a decision there must be more than one alternative open to him, even if the only available choices are between doing X and not doing X. For there is no deciding to be done when something is mandatory. No suggestion is being made here that all possible alternatives be

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that some philosophers have taken normative positions with regard to the proper objects-of-decision of the social scientist (hence the educational theorist). Karl Popper in 'Towards a Rational Theory of Tradition', Conjectures and Refutations (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963) suggested that the social scientist's main concern ought to be with the unintended (especially unwanted) consequences of social action. Presumably, therefore, the central concern is not with such things as means and ends, but with what might go awry in our attempts to achieve them.

Michael Oakeshott in 'Political Education', Rationalism and Politics (London: Methuean & Co., 1962) takes quite a different view. For him, decision-making is inextricably wound-up in the knowledge one has of past traditions and experiences. Decisions and their objects-of-decision, therefore, are presented to one through one's own tinted glasses - tinted by the past. Thus, Oakeshott thinks decision-makers are wisely advised to seek out dominant trends, or 'intimations', in the ongoing tradition of one's life and to allow these to suggest the object-of-decision.

Finally, John Dewey in Experience and Education (1938) (New York: Collier, 1963), Chapter 3, and Democracy and Education (1916) (New York: The Free Press, 1966), Chapter 4, inclines toward seeing as proper objects-of-decision the problems children have in mind that they want to solve. The objects-of-decision from the child's point of view, then, would be the problem itself; and for the teacher it would be the practical matter of facilitating the student's investigation.

As a brief comment on Popper's view one might point out that some, but surely not all, concerns of the educational decision-maker should be with unintended outcomes. Aims, course content, and teaching methods are areas, for example, which require concern about intended outcomes. As a normative recommendation, Oakeshott's conservatism can be rather insidious. If the intentions of one's traditions are immoral then one is not well advised to allow them to suggest objects-of-decision. If, on the other hand, we are alleged to be conceptually chained to traditions of thought, the position seems false. The transformation from absolutism to communism in Russia and China would surely speak against this. And, Dewey's concern with the problem solving aspect of education leaves very little room for seemingly proper objects-of-decision such as those to do with the enlightenment of the student on matters of which he knows nothing. And, as R.S. Peters says of Dewey's pragmatism 'The dimensions of speculative curiosity, of wonder and awe, are missing' ('John Dewey's Philosophy of Education', R.S. Peters, ed. John Dewey Reconsidered, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), p. 120.

In the next chapter, what I take to be the proper focus of objects-of-decision will be discussed.

considered (either logical or pragmatic), nor a wide range of them, nor that they be good ones, nor even clearly understood or articulable by the decision-maker. My claim is simply that it makes no sense to talk about a decision (at least in any sense relevant to our concerns about selecting curriculum decision-makers) unless the decision-maker believes there to be alternatives to a single course. That one should have a wide variety and clear understanding of appropriate alternatives is a normative claim to be dealt with later.

Now, as a corollary, if coming to or justifying a decision entails having alternatives then a description of them must be part of the reasoning involved in adopting one of them and hence it must appear among the premises (whether explicitly or implicitly). This would satisfy the formal requirement, mentioned earlier, of the prescribed action being stated in the premises.

Interestingly, the notion of alternatives links in an important way with the object-of-decision. How? If an option being considered by a decision-maker is not relevant to the 'object' (i.e. what is being decided about) it seems odd to imagine it as a bona fide 'alternative' at all. Clearly, if in the 'child on the tracks' example, we supposed that the potential rescuer also had the option of reaching into his pocket for a cigarette, it would be absurd to claim this as one of his alternatives regarding 'what to do about the child on the tracks' commensurate with such other possibilities as 'hold the child down between the tracks allowing the train to pass over', 'shout a warning to "Get Off!"', etc. Necessarily, therefore, alternatives must be relevant to the object-of-decision.

Another very important aspect of alternatives is the matter of what counts as the statement or exposition of the alternative? It is not so obvious as it seems. For I want to claim that a <u>full</u> statement of any alternative has three parts: (a) a <u>theoretical description</u> of the proposal (b) consideration of the <u>usual</u> consequences were that alternative to be chosen, and (c) consideration of the consequences that are likely <u>in this particular case</u>. <u>Pragmatic outcomes</u> is a term I will use for (b) and (c).

Consider a decision to introduce religious education (R.E.) into schools where it has not previously been taught. Suppose there are two basic alternatives: (A) implement the new programme; (B) refrain from doing so. What would it be to give an account of (A)? Clearly, (A) would have to be described. The components of the programme would have to be set out, its place in the time-table indicated, mention of who would be qualified to teach it, and so forth (i.e. (a), the theoretical

description). But is that all there is to it. To be sure, the alternative is, thus, stated. Still, we usually do something more in order to understand clearly what the alternative entails, and that is, we consider what normally happens when R.E. is introduced in a school. What subjects will have to be sacrificed? How will the teaching staff react? What problems are usually encountered with gathering appropriate materials? How do students and parents usually perceive R.E.? Other questions are raised of course, but these, or something akin to them, provide answers that help us to understand in a richer way than would otherwise be the case what the alternative, in a full-blown sense, is (i.e. pragmatic outcomes, of type (b)). Still there is something further. When working out just what an alternative entails, we would not only ask ourselves about the usual consequences of introducing R.E.; we would be concerned as well about the likely ramifications of starting it in the school(s) in question. Since circumstances of resource and personality (group and individual) vary, it would not do just to consider usual outcomes only; so the latter seems quite a proper and normal query. My claim is that a full account of the alternative (A), of introducing R.E., would include it as well (i.e. pragmatic outcomes of type (c)).

In speaking of this tripartite account of alternatives as being a 'full' account, the question arises as to whether consideration of pragmatic outcomes (or either part of them) is logically necessary to the statement of our alternative.[3] I incline to think that inclusion of them is part of the very notion of our alternative in <u>practical decision-making</u>. That is, I find it hard to conceive of an alternative being stated without such consideration. I would not however want to argue the point too strenuously for very little rests on it. If a conceptual connection will not hold without difficulty, it is an easy normative claim to substantiate. For who would argue that in deciding on practical matters one ought to make some effort to set out, not only the theoretical description of an alternative, but the likely consequences of it being implemented - not just in general, but in the particular case at hand?

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[3]Hare does not distinguish 'theoretical description' from 'pragmatic' outcomes, but treats them instead as conjointly constitutive of what an 'alternative' entails. His view is that, as a matter of fact, we do think of both aspects of alternatives when decision-making.

(c) Justifying Principles

Decision-making requires more than just knowledge of alternatives and their hypothetical outcomes. Earlier I mentioned that decisions, at least those we are concerned with, are (a) prescriptive, and (b) inferred from premises: this being true, a formal requirement of the premises is that a prescriptive statement be among them. Now when anything is prescribed (ruling out an arbitrary prescription, if such a thing makes sense to say) the individual doing it needs some evaluative basis or justification for rating it more highly than its alternatives. That is, to make a reasoned prescription requires some grounds which incline us to choose one alternative over the other as the thing we should do (morally or practically, as the case may be).

What would perform this role? In games like chess, for example, one decides between moving the bishop diagonally or horizontally, by appealing to the rules. Whether or not one should capture an opponent's piece in a given move, however, is not settled by the rules but in being part of some strategy, a conventional one or perhaps a newly created one, depending upon whether the player in question has previously learned or is imagining a new one. Now, to some extent, there is a parallel between the evaluative-prescriptive role played by the rules and strategies in chess and something similar in curriculum decisions. For instance, custom and social norms are largely responsible for the justification (i.e. evaluative-prescriptive role) of deciding what structure and content the curriculum should have and how teaching should be carried out. To the extent that tradition and custom form rule-like procedural directives in the way that chess rules function, the two parallel one another. However, the important way in which they differ is that the formal rules of chess themselves not only regulate the game but they officially define it and hence require no external justification (e.g. it would be absurd to ask what justification we have for the rule stating that bishops must move diagonally). On the other hand, the traditions, conventions and norms which regulate (evaluate-prescribe) curriculum decisions are surely subject to higher order justification by various branches of educational theory and morality. Therefore, specific rules, norms, etc., or justifying principles as I shall call them from now on, mediate between our hypothetical knowledge of the outcomes of alternatives providing a required basis upon which we can evaluate and then prescribe one as preferable to the

others.[4]

This seems an opportune point at which to look back at our account of alternatives and make an observation which had to be foregone until justifying principles had been introduced. It is simply this. Decisions are made on the basis of a consideration of descriptions and pragmatic outcomes of alternatives: unless one were always in a position to have complete foreknowledge of how things were going to turn out, which we rarely ever are - particularly in the social sciences - it would be necessary to make predictions. But since predictions involve the employment of techniques of weighing evidence and making judgments, they too depend upon justification by appeal to relevant principles. Alternatives are themselves decisions, unless, of course, the outcomes are known in advance, and no judgments are required.[5]

Returning to justifying principles: I want to fill in this characterization a bit further by pointing out that collections of predetermined rules, traditions, customs or social norms, are not the only ways of regulating behaviour by functioning as mediators between alternatives. Sometimes we concoct a principle of sorts for the occasion at hand. A moral decision may have been made on the grounds of some moral directive we created to suit our particular decision circumstance, which itself is derived from, or justified by, appeal to higher order principles, or else because it coheres with a larger body of moral beliefs we hold. So when I say that justifying principles mediate between alternatives and our actual choice among them is the making of a decision, I am not claiming that, to put it metaphorically, we reach into our bag of preestablished codes and pull out the appropriate one; often we have to make one up, and if it can be justified at all, or if we are concerned that it should be, this is done by establishing its connection with other principles or bodies of them. A similar example, where a justifying principle is 'invented' for an occasion is where a decision is justified by one's personal tastes.[6] When X relishes lobster rather than steak on the menu his decision to order the former is justified by his preference or personal taste for it. Of course we could endeavour to explain this choice, i.e. find the reasons perhaps

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[4] I found Israel Scheffler's paper 'Justifying Curriculum Decisions' in his book Reason and Teaching (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), pp. 116-25, quite helpful here.

[5] See Hare, p. 59.

[6] The idea for this point also comes from Hare.

psychological or social for his wanting lobster, but his reason for the selection need go no further than reference to his taste buds.

There is a further point. If bits and pieces of larger bodies of beliefs like specific rules, customs, or tastes can be developed to suit a particular occasion and to enable us to make a decision then it follows as well that they can pass from our use as quickly as they came. The fact that our preference for lobster enables us to decide between it and steak on one occasion does not thereby mean that this particular preference must guide all similar choices on other occasions, or ever again for that matter. Tastes can change; and so can regulatives of other sorts that are non constitutive of activities (like chess rules).

(d) Summary

So far then our view is that a reasoned decision is an action prescription about some object-of-decision which is stated in the conclusion of a valid inductive or deductive argument structure. The inference is made from two (sets of) premises. One of these describes (either explicitly or implicitly) the alternatives between or among which the decision is being made and says something about the outcomes. The other describes a justifying principle(s) (e.g. rule, norm, preference, or abstract principle) which performs the essential function of mediating between or among alternatives enabling the decision-maker to assign priority to his selection. To sum this up: a reasoned decision is a choice among alternatives which is justified by some 'principle'.

If this is the formal structure and accompanying characterization of 'decisions' then what characterization attaches to 'competent' decisions?

4. Principles Which Guide the Making of Correct Decisions

Rather than trying to analyse what is normally meant by speakers of English when they use 'competence' correctly let us simply ask ourselves what principles would govern the making of ideal decisions. In other words, what constitutes quality in decision-making? From this vantage point we can look at gradations downward from the ideal when we get to the point of considering who ought to make decisions. We will look for those most closely approximating the ideal.

(a) Principles and Correct Decisions

A word about strategy. It is one thing to understand the structure of a reasoned decision but quite another to see what principles guide the selection of its components. That is, while it may be necessary for a 'decision' to have alternatives and some justifying principle, the question still remains: What governs the selection of them, i.e. How do we know when something qualified as an alternative or a justifying principle? And this question subdivided into (1) What principles are logically necessary? and (2) What principles best promote correct decisions? (i.e. where conclusions follow from premises which are optimally relevant and true). One is a logical question and the other normative. Why should either concern us? If we could find answers to both it might help us to determine necessary and desirable epistemic characteristics of individuals who select alternative and justification in the making of curriculum decisions.

I want to get underway by re-introducing the term object-of-decision. As stated earlier, I take this to be specifically what a decision is about. The 'object' in a teacher's dilemma between alternative A, sending a student to a remedial reading specialist, and alternative B, keeping him in the general class but giving him extra help, is 'what is to be done about this student's reading problem?'. The reason for bringing this up here is what I want to show how both structural features of a decision (i.e. alternatives and justifying principles) must relate in a certain way to the 'object' in order to (a) satisfy the logical requirements necessary to qualify as 'alternatives' or 'justifying principles', and in another way to (b) satisfy certain normative stipulations which shall be posited as principles, the satisfactory appeal to which is vital to ideal, or logically correct, decisions.

I want to get at the two logical principles which are compatibility and consistency by showing how they bear upon first, alternatives, and then justifying principles, both in relation to objects-of-decisions. Let us start with 'objects' and alternatives.

(b) Principles Logically Necessary for Decision-Making

(i) Compatibility

Procedural options, in my opinion, are not the same thing as decision-making alternatives. Compatibility with an object-of-decision is what makes two or more options, alternatives: this can be clarified by an illustration. Imagine a chess game situation in which one's king is in

check and there are two possible escaping moves. As a player, one has three 'options': A, concede defeat, B, move out of check using the first escape, C, use the second escape. As a decision-maker, however, one cannot get started at treating these as competing 'alternatives' until one assumes an object-of-decision, i.e. what is to be decided about. For instance, if we take as the 'object' 'avoid defeat' then both B and C could compete as alternatives, one of which to be adjudged superior (or at least preferable) by its being justified by some point of strategy; but option A is not even applicable to this decision. In other words, it may be a player's option, but it does not make sense as a decision-maker's alternative. On the other hand, if we change the object-of-decision to something like 'end the game' then option A seems plausible as alternative A. Formerly, A was incompatible with the 'object' but now it is compatible with the new object. Therefore, if an option is to qualify as an alternative the first requirement to be met is compatibility with the object-of-decision.

At this point it looks as though a decision-maker needs to do a preliminary justification of whatever options seem presentable, in order to determine whether they warrant bona fide status as alternatives I think this is correct: the business of selecting alternatives is a normative one even at its roots. However, deciding among the alternatives thus selected entails a more sophisticated normative operation; but we will talk about this later. For now I want to say a bit more about the other principle which is logically necessary to the selection of alternatives: or to put it another way, the conditions which must be fulfilled for options to be granted the status of 'alternatives'.

(ii) Consistency

To demonstrate that 'consistency' is the second principle, consider the chess game situation again. Part of what enables us to consider options B and C as alternatives open to the player endeavouring to save the trapped king and avoid defeat is that both moves are consistent with the rules of chess in general and with their application in this particular context. In short, the rules of chess restrict the ways in which pieces can move, and if we want to continue playing the game of chess we cannot accept as viable alternatives, options which violate the rules. I do not intend this as a normative point, but a logical one.

Chess examples are tidy ones - too tidy - so we ought to consider a decision-making situation in which the governance of rules is not obvious.

(iii) Compatibility and consistency once again

Picture a student asking himself 'what should I decide to do when I get my degree?'. He considers the following options: Do postgraduate work, seek employment in industry, enter the civil service, or go to lunch. Clearly, the last of these seems out of place with the others, not because it fails to present an option, but because it is inappropriate to the obvious decision-making issue (object) 'what should be the student's career choice?'. This is an application of the compatibility principle: we have noticed the offending option does not link with the object-of-decision inasmuch as the former is simply not relevant to the latter. How about consistency? Unlike chess, constitutive and strict regulating rules are inconspicuous, though not entirely absent. Just as alternatives in chess must be possible within the rules, alternatives in social affairs are subject to legal, moral, social, economic, and biological constraints (just to mention a few). A moral man cannot consider as alternatives, options which he believes to be immoral (i.e. inconsistent with his moral principles, rules, or whatever) any more than any of us, as mortals, could consider as alternatives biological impossibilities like walking on water. So, regarding our student, whether or not remaining items above can, in fact, be alternatives for him depends upon their being consistent with the 'rules' which govern his life.

I see no reason why the alternatives of any decision-making situation could not be accounted for by sorting out options in to alternatives in virtue of being consistent and compatible with their objects-of-decision.

'Justifying principles' require more or less the same treatment. It is obvious that each must be compatible with the object-of-decision, e.g. the strategy which justifies taking one rather than the other move out of check in our earlier example, must be compatible with the 'object' of 'preventing defeat'. Furthermore, it must be consistent with whatever body of rules, norms, or beliefs, govern the formation of these sorts of justification. For example, a particular strategy which justifies the chess move indicated above must be consistent with further stages of the overall strategy, and, as well, it must be consistent with the body of beliefs which constitute the formation rules of chess strategies generally. Similarly, in the example of the student's career choice, whatever justifies his particular selection itself must be consistent with the body of beliefs which justify other like decisions.

(C) Normative Principles

Necessarily, a decision-maker must be capable of sorting out alternatives and justifications in accordance with these formal principles, but much more could be hoped for, indeed expected, in a good, as opposed to simply 'competent', decision-maker. Three offshoots from the principle of compatibility could promote better quality decision-making - i.e. greater frequency of 'correctness'. I suggest that branching out from the notion of compatibility, alternatives and justifications should have (a) breadth in terms of the variety and number, (b) depth as regards the decision-maker's understanding of outcomes of alternatives and theoretical basis of justifications, and (c) centrality, by which I mean the decision-maker, ideally, should be capable of ascertaining those alternatives and justifications which are of greatest importance. These should be discussed in terms of both alternatives and principles.

(i) Alternatives and breadth, depth and centrality

Alternatives first. Concerning breadth: establishing the object-of-decision opens the gates to the possibility of differing alternatives limited only in number and variety to the point where the human imagination will carry no further (within the confines of consistency and compatibility of course) - an indefinite number of alternatives. In other words, a formal requirement of decision is that there be choice between at least two alternatives: that we might have a great deal of choice, so long as it is manageable in practical terms, seems to me obviously desirable.

The depth of understanding of alternatives and their outcomes is also an important consideration in ideal decisions. Remember, we seek not only theoretical understanding of the ceteris peribus outcome but pragmatic implications bearing in mind all of the variable features of time, place, and individuals involved in the specific decision at hand. For example, sending a child for remedial reading classes may have pragmatic implications which go far beyond the pedagogical aspects: the child's ego may suffer, insensitive parents might take this as failure on the part of the child to work hard and punish him, and so on. The possibility of ever increasingly sophisticated and refined theoretical descriptions of the alternatives, and never ending pragmatic implications makes complete knowledge of outcomes highly improbable. From this point of view an ideal decision-maker, I suppose, would be clairvoyant. But short of that, gradations of knowledge from more to less are

what ought to incline us toward one decision-maker rather than others, at least in this regard.

That an alternative be compatible with the object-of-decision, it be one among a great range of them, and its outcomes completely known, still provides no assurance that this particular alternative is vitally important - that it is central to the object. To some extent this condition is encroaching on the justification of one alternative as opposed to others, but I do not intend it as having reached the stage of formal justification. I want to make the distinction between saying X is compatible with Y: X is central to Y: X is necessary for Y. That a good decision-maker be capable of sifting his alternatives for central ones suggests that he is performing a prima facie justification perhaps; yet, I believe we can usefully separate the important considerations from the vital one, that which we eventually justify as the most important, essential, necessary, or vital.

(ii) Justifying principles and breadth, depth and centrality

All three categories are important to justifying principles though in a slightly different way. In a given decision it is to be hoped that, relative to the object-of-decision, one could provide a wide range of alternatives which are central in importance and understood as regards outcomes, indepth. The optimum, regarding justifications, for such a decision however, would not be in having a great number: we do not seek a large number and variety of justifications as we do alternatives to choose from; rather we seek the one justification, or interconnected grouping of them, which is better than all other possibilities. Remember, 'decisions' require more than one alternative but only one justification. Where breadth comes in, therefore, is not in range of justifications, but range of knowledge of possibilities for justification. In chess, for example, the strategy which justifies move B rather than C, as a matter of logic, need not come from the player's widely ranging cognitive storehouse of strategies - it may be the only one he knows and good luck makes it appropriate here. But as a normative stipulation it seems clear that his promise as a high quality decision-maker improves with the breadth of his understanding of uniform strategies and the appropriate procedural rules of strategy-making that would enable him to devise further ones of his own.

As for depth: that one should understand the theoretical basis of the justifications - what justifies a justification - is a further normative stipulation which seems valuable, if only instrumentally, in providing the decision-maker with even higher order grounds for

choosing as he does. Educational theory provides apt illustrations. Pedagogical choices are frequently made on the grounds of compatibility and consistency with a supporting educational theory which itself is a theoretician's product and possibly, therefore, fallible - inadequate or simply false. For example, the decision to send a child to a remedial reading specialist may have been made on the basis of a specialized test given the child; yet the test itself may have been inadequate to test the deficiencies for which it was designed. Clearly, one's ability to assess the quality of the test as well as be aware that it, or some test of reading ability, is, prima facie, a useful justification for selecting one alternative over another (e.g. sending a student to a remedial specialist rather than keeping him in the general class) seems to boost the competence of a decision-maker.

The notion of centrality is less applicable here than with alternatives because something would only count as a justification for a particular decision if it were absolutely central (or be seen as such) to the object-of-decision. However, to the extent that one sifts through possible justifications (e.g. strategies in chess) looking only among those which are obviously pertinent - central - one does employ the idea of centrality in justifying principles.

Naturally our authorization of a curriculum decision-maker should be directed toward he whose decisions are most frequently 'correct'. Having established the character of a competent decision it behooves us now to consider the epistemic credentials of decision-makers and formulate clearly a set of minimum necessary conditions for the competent decision-maker. Whether this will lead us to a criterion, i.e. empirically verifiable credentials, remains to be seen.

5. Necessary Conditions of Competence

Three epistemic credentials are necessary to making competent curriculum decisions: (a) knowledge of alternatives (i.e. theoretical descriptions and pragmatic outcomes) and justifying principles (b) cognitive ability to perform the deductive and inductive operations of reasoning and judging consistency and compatibility (and perhaps also depth, breadth and centrality) and the affective ability to adhere to decisions once made (c) pragmatic capability of economically accurately gathering vital data about theoretical descriptions and practical outcomes of alternatives.

That (a) above is a decision-making requirement is obvious. How

could one decide about the content of curriculum without having the slightest inkling of what might count as an alternative, or what would justify one of the alternatives, if we knew them? Really, the question is 'What must we know in order to know the alternatives and justifications?' This question is crucial to assigning decision-making competence, yet very complex. It will, therefore, be left to the next chapters. Items (b) and (c) can be expeditiously dealt with here.

(a) The Cognitive and Affective Abilities Condition of Competence

A number of abilities, both cognitive and affective, underly the whole enterprise of rational decision-making: formulating alternatives and coming to conclusions which express decisions. Think of the cognitive requirements for drawing an inference from some state of affairs and understanding its modality as being necessary or contingent (and thereby, probable, possible, etc.). Projecting a consequent from the antecedent involves imagination, intuitive power, orginality, and a sense of relevance. Conceiving of the inferred consequence as necessary would entail considerable maturity of conceptual development notably in the areas of causality, temporal relations, a priori, analyticity, consistency, and compatibility. Understanding it as contingent would require such notions as probability, possibility, evidence, confirmation, and proof. Along with these features of conceptual maturity are a number of dispositions or awarenesses, which are, to some extent, matters of intellectual maturity (or the final stage of intellectual development as we would understand from Piaget and Kohlberg), and to a further degree 'excellences', or virtues in the Aristotelian sense, which, in either case, are components of competence and good quality decision-making. They are such things as consistency, precision, clarity, accuracy, objectivity, rigour, impartiality, and respect for facts and arguments.

Equally, emotional, or affective, components are germane to decision-making, though they are frequently ignored. For example, a certain amount of confidence is necessary, not so much for drawing conclusions but for sticking to the decisions which they house even in the face of challenges from authorities and external pressures. Such traits as self-esteem, firmness, uninhibitedness, integrity, courage and determination are central here. Yet, a decision-maker must be flexible and in order to do so need be cautious, conscientious, and constructive.

Mentioning all of this seems to me important because it is ignored

by some who would nominate children as curriculum decision-makers (cf. the free school and deschooling movements) when clearly they lack sufficient intellectual maturity; others, as I shall argue in another chapter, make far too much of it, wanting to extend the claims of intellectual incapability to adolescents so as to exclude them from nomination even when this appears factually incorrect. The features of intellectual maturity and ability necessary for the making of reasoned decision is often inappropriate to support the claims and disclaims of competence in the candidacy of children; more will be said of this later.

Marginal intellectual competence may be a precondition of making reasoned decisions, but is the ideal, i.e. our ideal of perfection in a curriculum decision-maker, one whose intellectual capabilities are the polar opposite, namely brilliance? It is tempting to say yes, but within the scope of 'curriculum decisions' are a great many mundane issues of little consequence which require the mental talents of little more than a child (e.g. Should the curtains be open or closed when the overhead projector is in use?). That a decision-maker be able to see the most profound and subtle theoretical justification for the mundane reflects well on the ingenuity of the individual in question but no significant benefits to the educational enterprise are necessarily incurred. When sorting through alternative decision-makers in later chapters we would be well advised to bear in mind the importance of the decision and the requirements (intellectually) of making satisfactory decisions, as well as concerning ourselves with simply assessing intellectual prowesse.

(b) Adequate Access

For the most part, this topic relates more closely to problems of execution, i.e. ways of overcoming practical obstacles in the implementation of decisions (e.g. convincing others to go along with one's decision) than it does to the activity of decision-making, but there is, however, one capacity which anyone making a decision must have. One must be capable of availing oneself of accurate data which is vital to assessing pragmatic outcomes of alternatives. Adequate access to data is essential in the gleening of information which is peculiar to a given situation - that which differentiates it from all others - which pertains to the infinite variations having to do with the social, psychological, and economic circumstances of the individuals involved. And what sort of access is adequate? In some cases it must be first

hand observations; someone else's report necessarily filters and interprets first hand observations in terms of what is thought to be important, thereby transmitting to the decision-maker impressions and evaluations and summarizations. For some types of decision-making second-hand reports are a necessary economy. I will attempt to show that in many curriculum areas such economy is often counterproductive - too much valuable detail is lost. Adequate access can also entail a form of information gathering of a more 'personal' type than of simply 'detached observation'. By this I mean a subtle understanding of the probable reactions of another person to particular stimuli and to their less outwardly apparent beliefs and emotional sensibilities. Obvious examples of such close personal relationships are those often found in intensely emotional couplings like husband and wife, parent and child, and even between bitter enemies. To a lesser extent such relationships can arise among friends and teachers and students.

6. The Feasibility of Developing a Criterion

It is one thing to claim that a competent decision-maker must fulfill certain logical conditions but quite another to have a criterion, a rule, or set of them, which enables us to tell who actually fulfills these conditions and who does not. Clearly these are logically distinct: X may know that p even if Y has no way of determining this - perhaps X just will not let on! For our part, however, a checklist of some description is necessary. How should we go about it?

We could do two things: develop a criterion abstractly and then use it to deal with our alternative decision-makers, or simply investigate the candidates straight-away, asking ourselves if and how each could fulfill the conditions. The former would have an advantage insofar as the quality, or rather the extensiveness of a newly developed criterion, or set of rules, would be concerned, for presumably, if we came up with a comprehensive set of rules for distinguishing the competent from the charlatans we could use it to deal with any number of candidates, even some with whom we are not concerned in this thesis. But this I fear is the failing point of this plan. For while the criterion would be extensive and complete if worked up in abstraction, independent of those candidates with whom we are specifically concerned, it would be a more powerful device than we really need, and quite time

consuming to construct. It seems more practicable for our purposes simply to take the short cut by fastening ourselves only on the candidates who are of direct interest to this thesis. After all, we are not really interested in working out all of the ways the conditions of competence might be fulfilled, hypothetically; we only want to know <u>if</u> our candidates can be competent and <u>how</u>. So our future task will be to direct our attention to considerations of competence as they pertain to students, parents, experts, and teachers as potential curriculum decision-makers.

Chapter III

ACTIVITIES AND CONTEXTS (1)

1. Introduction

Having in mind the general problem of determining who ought to have authority to make curriculum decisions, we attempted in the last chapter to clarify the meaning of 'competence' as it pertains to decision-making. We discussed the structure of competent decision-making and then argued that individuals would have to meet certain standards if they were ever to qualify; though we left it for a future chapter to determine exactly how. Just to review: it was claimed that rational decision-making involves sifting through random options for genuine alternatives, then choosing among them, relative to an object-of-decision, (i.e. whatever is being decided about), on the basis of a justifying principle - something which enables the chooser to assign preference to one alternative over the others. As for the intellectual requirements of those who would be capable of this, we said that one must have a whole host of cognitive and affective abilities which are essential to performing the operation of inference and keeping to decisions once made - something which deep-seated insecurities and external emotional pressures can make very difficult. These abilities, however, are insufficient in themselves for decision-making. One must have knowledge of what is being decided about. That is, one must know what the object-of-decision is, what the alternatives are, and what justifying principles are relevant.

How is one to know the proper ranges of alternatives and justifications? What sort of knowledge background must the decision-maker have? I want to agree with the prevailing view that a knowledge of subject content, educational theory, teaching methodology and practical experience are logical prerequisites - the particular decision, of course, determining the type of knowledge to be emphasized. But I want to make, as well, a further and more unusual claim. It is that education, that is to say formal schooling, is an <u>activity</u> and as such has a particular sort of structure. It is an understanding of this structure and how its' components relate to one another that is vital to decision-making. In addition, activities exist within particular sorts of circumstances which I will call <u>context</u>. This, I will endeavour to show, has an enormous bearing upon decisions. Consequently, a knowledge of the activity structure must be supplemented by an understanding of the context.

There is a connection between understanding the activity of formal education and its context and knowledge of subject content, educational theory and so forth. My intention in this chapter and the next two is to unpack the notion of education as an activity and then link this with knowledge of subject content, etc. The purpose in doing this is to show the sort of knowledge that is required of a competent curriculum decision-maker. In light of this we will be able to ask, later, who is likely to have this sort of knowledge? Who, therefore, ought to control curriculum?

2. Activities and Contexts

I want to begin by analysing the logical structure, or form, of an 'activity' and then go on to discuss 'context' and its relationship to activities. Considerable use will be made of these concepts in this and later chapters so the detailed accounts to be given will, I hope, be justified.

(a) Activities

(i) The concept of an activity[1]

The position to be taken is that activities are comprised of actions which, in turn, are fundamental units of intentional behaviour, and which are strung together into a coherent whole by a programme and set of procedures.

First, a general point about activities. Golf, tennis, soccer, monopoly and chess are characteristic activities. Equally, within any of these we could identify sub-activities. In golf, for example, it would not seem odd to speak of putting as an activity in its own right, though quite definitely part of the supra-activity of golf. Indeed, golf is made up of many activities, of which putting is only one. The

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[1]There is an enormous literature in action theory which has a bearing on many of the issues raised in this analysis. Anything like a complete listing would be out of the question but the following are notable: Myles Brand ed., The Nature of Human Action (Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman & Co., 1970), (An interesting collection of articles and book selections which includes contributions from A.I. Meldon (see also his Human Action (New York: Humanities Press, 1961), Gilbert Ryle, Donald Davidson, and Arthur Danto). In The Concept of Motivation (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958), R.S. Peters has some interesting things to say about the connections between human actions, rules and motives (see especially Chapters one and two).

relationship between activities and the sub activities which comprise it will be discussed fully a bit later, but for now I wanted simply to identify the sort of entity we will be talking about as an 'activity'.

Second, any activity is comprised of actions. And they, in turn, are intentional units of behaviour. (I am inclined to call them fundamental units of behaviour so as to make them clearly distinguishable from actions; but we must be careful with 'fundamental' because of its vagueness. Any fundamental unit could be construed as having even more fundamental units, and they even more . Nevertheless, it is a rough distinction which ought to serve us without difficulty.)

An activity, like putting, say, would involve various actions such as lining up the ball (with the hole) and stroking it. These I will call fundamental units of behaviour with the understanding that, strictly speaking, they may be further subdivided. But it is important to make the further note that these actions are not just fundamental behaviours, they are intentional. The activity of putting is not composed of random or coincidental actions (i.e. behaviours): they are done by an agent who intends them to be executed in suchandsuch a way.

Point three arises from this question: If an agent intends to act in such-and-such a way, what is it that inclines him to act in that way rather than some other? The answer is that the agent acts in the way he does because he is following a rule. In activities, that is to say, there are proper ways of doing things, which are specified by rules or procedural directives of some sort.[2] How one goes about

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[2] In the considerable body of philosophical debate on the status of rules, there has been a distinction made by John Searle (Speech Acts, London: Cambridge University Press, 1969) between regulative and constitutive rules. In any activity, the former guide and direct behaviour. The latter not only regulate but actually define, or constitute, the activity. Regulative rules guide but do not define the activity; constitutive rules do both.

Geoffrey Warnock (The Object of Morality, London: Methuen, 1971) down-plays the importance of this distinction. He says, first, that all rules regulate. (It is unclear whether he is criticising Searle for saying they do not; which, of course, would be a mistake on Warnock's part, since Searle explicitly states that both regulative and constitutive rules regulate.) Second, he claims that this distinction between types of rules seems really to be a groping after a different sort of point about rules, namely how they function.

I would support Warnock's second point; though of particular importance for me is that the regulative-constitutive distinction is thought to be artificial. This I agree with because, as I will argue in other terms later, all rules that normally occur in (regulate) a given activity, in a sense, constitute that activity. Granted they may not 'officially' define the activity; but they are certainly integral to the characterization of the activity - i.e. to our conception of what components make

putting, or playing the game of golf, is, from the procedural point of view, according to various rules - rules governing the proper way to putt, or in the larger case, to play golf. That is, one could not putt by bashing the golf ball into the ground with a tree branch! That might be an action - an intentional behaviour - but it is not part of the activity of putting or the larger activity of golf.

The directives of an activity - the rules - are what I will call procedures. Taken together, procedures give unity to an activity. They draw together a variety of actions into something we recognize as a coherent whole - such as golf or a dance. It goes without saying, therefore, that the procedures of an activity must be consistent with one another. For instance, in golf it would not be consistent with one which prohibits stroking the ball out of bounds and another rule which specifies that precisely this should be done.

If one were asked to characterize a particular activity part of the job could be done by relating the procedures. One could give a rendering of golf by stating the rules of play, strategies and so forth. But there is something more. To make golf or any other activity intelligible something more general must be said to draw a picture of the sort of game that golf is. A general description would be necessary; and one would want to say something about the purpose of the game and the point to doing this part of the game and that part. To that could be added some sort of explanation of the items described; and there could be a listing of general principles that oversee the more specific procedures.

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up the activity. In opposition one might claim that rules of procedure- for example, the proper way of holding a golf club - are not essential to the existence of the game; hence they cannot constitute, or even characterize the activity. This is unconvincing, I find, because one could say precisely the same about a great many of the allegedly constitutive, i.e. formal, rules. For example, in golf, if we did not take penalties for going out of bounds, allowed all putts within five inches of the hole to count as in and removed by hand any shots landing in a sandtrap, would we no longer be playing golf? And on the other side of the argument, is it not the case that particular rules of strategy and etiquette become so commonly applied that they develop into essential aspects of one's conception of the activity? To put it bluntly, the notion of constitutive rules seems rather tenuous; held up only by the fact that in games and so forth there are official rules and that it seems convenient sometimes to speak of them as defining the activity.

For an extended discussion of rule-following and the rule-governedness of activities see Peter Winch, The Idea of a Social Science (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958) especially p. 24-39.

These elements combine to form what I will call the programme of the activity. Now it is important to note here that some authors speak of activities as having a 'point' or 'overall purpose'.[3] I think, though, this is to make the story much too short. For apart from how one actually engages in an activity - by following the procedures - a much richer conception of what lies behind the activity such as I have given in the account of 'programme' seems to do more justice to how we actually understand an activity.

As with procedures, the elements of the programme must be internally consistent. Obviously golf cannot properly be described as a game played with clubs and a game played with racquets. Also, the programme must be consistent with the procedures. If rugby is described as a body contact sport then the rules cannot expressedly forbid body contact.

There are two subsidiary points here. First, to follow procedural directives is to make a decision. It is to choose a particular way of acting from among the alternatives. And, it is the rule or procedure that functions as the 'justifying principle'. We choose to act in the way we do because the rule indicates that it is (more) proper, advantageous, etc. than other alternatives.[4] Second, it is possible for an activity to have more than one programme and set of procedures. Riding a bicycle, for instance, could be described and explained and undertaken according to different rules by two different people. For them to be engaging in an identical activity, as opposed to different versions of the same (general) activity, the programmes and procedures of the one person's actions must be logically equivalent to those of the other.[5]

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[3] Glenn Langford and R.S. Peters in 'Values and Education (1) and (2)' in Glenn Langford and D.J. O'Connor eds., New Essays in the Philosophy of Education (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973) speak of activities as having a 'point' (Peters) and 'overall purpose' (Langford).

[4] This is quite in disagreement with Wittgenstein who, in Philosophical Investigations (first edition 1953) (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1974) sections 219, 232, maintains that, as a procedural matter, rules are followed blindly. This may be so whence rules become habituated (though even so, a subconscious decision is no less a decision), but some rules are not. I may learn the rules of the road in a foreign country and think carefully each time an occasion to use one arises when I am driving there.

[5] Searle, in Speech Acts op. cit., p. 39 gives an interesting example of two sets of chess rules which follow different conventions with regard to the way pieces are to be moved but both reduce to applications of the same general rule. Languages, he claims, are like this.

Returning to the main points: I want to say, fourth, that procedural rules may be formal or informal. Formal rules would be those that have some 'official' claim to be necessary elements in the definition of the activity, e.g. to be found in the book of rules, or always espoused (and followed) by known authorities. Informal rules would be those which are not, strictly speaking, official but which are, nevertheless, followed by participants, including authorities and experts, whether they are articulated or not; and can be, as I will endeavour to show later, part of the constitution of the activity.[6] A soccer player, for example, would observe the official rules of play, but would, as well, regulate his actions by numerous strategies, rules-of-thumb, matters of etiquette, and so on, which are informal rules, and very much part of the activity known as soccer.

Fifth is a point on which great importance is to be placed, now and in future chapters. It is that the programme and procedures of an activity are not simply propositions that are understood, and, in the case of procedures, obeyed. They can both be understood at more and less sophisticated levels; and the number of propositions forming the corpus of the programme and of the rules can be more than standard.

Rules, first, may themselves be understood at different levels. The works of Piaget and Kohlberg are well known for providing similar explanations of the different levels on which rules per se can be understood. Rules can range from being seen as directives with no meaning or significance other than resulting in some pleasantness if obeyed or, perhaps more likely, unpleasantness if disobeyed, to human constructs which may be evaluated as either morally or practically good on the basis of further principles (or perhaps be seen as good principles in themselves). So there is, as a first point, the fact that rules themselves admit of a more or less sophisticated level of understanding. Strictly speaking, then, an activity could be engaged in by someone even at the lowest of these levels, so long as he could construe the rules as part of a larger whole - i.e. as part of an activity. Such a participant, however, would only be marginally competent when compared with someone whose understanding of rules, per se, was more sophisticated.

But more important still is surely the fact that the content of some rules can be understood in greater depth than others, and in many

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[6]This formal-informal distinction would probably be taken by Searle to correspond to his constitutive - regulative distinction. My point, of course, is that activities come to be characterized (constituted by) all of the rules that normally govern them - both formal and informal.

cases a greater number of rules than just the standard ones can be known.

Talk of in-depth understanding of some rules is inappropriate, of course. One's tennis serve, for example, must land within a certain marked-off portion of the court. One either understands this or one does not. However, in some sports or games the application of a rule in some situations affords one player an option to do x or y (perhaps more). In American and Canadian football, for instance, there are circumstances under which one team, against whom there has been an infraction of the rules, is given two options by a further rule. In order to understand the rule one must understand what consequences normally follow from selecting each option. But there are different levels of understanding them; for one may understand that options x and y are both available without seeing the significance (with regard to winning and losing - game plan or strategy) of either. This, of course, applies to many rules whether they are of the sort that provide options or not. One still must see the consequences, and perhaps as well, see the importance of the rule in question to the activity as a whole. All of this can be understood more or less.

And, one must not forget that not all rules are formal rules. If, in the category of informal rules, we include strategies (which act as justifying principles for some of the decisions within the activity), then most assuredly in-depth understanding is possible. Ingenuity combines with foresight, skill of execution, and overall understanding of the activity in this. Strategy, tactics and techniques are not just knowing what to do, but when!

To be sure, one can participate in activities in which one does not know all of the formal rules. Many unsophisticated chess players do not know the rule of en passant which under certain circumstances, allows a pawn to take an opponent's piece in an unorthodox manner. And it is quite obvious that some tennis players do not know that when stroking the ball it is not permissible for the ball to hit the frame of the racquet - it must touch the strings only. Like most sports and games, chess and tennis could be played without knowing a great many of the rules. A competent player (or an optimally competent player), however, would know all of the rules, or a very large portion of them.

Equally, when thinking of informal rules, numerous rules of etiquette or strategies could be unknown to a participant. Indeed, since strategies can be invented, there is always a petential for more regulative rules to come into existence and hence be known by a sophisticated player.

Turning our attention to the programme of an activity, much the

same applies with regard to depth and breadth of understanding. For within the 'programme' are the descriptions, explanations, aims, principles, purposes, etc., which, quite obviously, can be understood in greater or lesser depth and breadth. For example, golf, to some, is 'a good walk spoiled' - a rule-governed activity which consists largely in banging around a small white ball in pretty surroundings! Others might describe and explain it differently - with more subtlety, sensitivity and understanding - as a game of strategy, style, skill, subtlety, patience and emotional control; and a game whose aims include providing fresh air and physical exercise, good sportsmanship, competiveness and improved body coordination. Much more could be said, of course, but the point is that someone who takes the latter view is not simply making a psychological or preferential judgment, he actually has a different - a more penetrating and circumspective - conception of the game than does the person in the former instance. Again, this would be true of chess. One can play the game describing it only in terms of manoeuvres directed toward capturing the opposition's king; or one could see it as a game of pattern, strategy and psychological play. This is not just to give a more long-winded, but equivalent, description; it is to give a different, more in-depth account. And as one elaborated further, the account would become increasingly broad.

My point in sum, therefore, is that activities are objective entities insofar as they have public and standard rules and descriptions. But there is a subjective dimension as well. That is, to a large degree, an activity is what it is conceived to be by its participants (and others, e.g. officials and spectators). Now there must be some degree of common conception in order for all participants to conceive themselves as engaged in the same activity as the others, and that conceptions must align with the standard conception of activity <u>A</u>, if activity <u>A</u> is to be the activity they are engaged in. But it does not seem at all odd to suppose that some participants understand much more about the activity than others; and understand in greater depth and detail those portions which they know in common with other participants.

Sixth is a purely expository point. In future I will refer to the programme and procedures (both formal and informal rules) as the activity <u>structure</u>. For it seems quite legitimate to say that what describes and explains an activity, and what regulates its' procedures is, in aggregate, that which gives the activity its structure.

(ii) <u>Micro activities and macro activities</u>

Not only can actions combine into activities, but in like fashion,

activities can, on similar principles, combine to make other activities.

A macro activity can be composed of micro activities so long as some central programme - i.e. description, explanation, aims, principles and purposes - unifies the latter by making them consistent and compatible; that is, into a coherent whole.[7] Setting up a defensive posture in chess, acquiring all of the railroads and ultilities in Monopoly, putting in golf, airplanes arranging themselves in a particular formation for part of a flying display, preparing and serving drinks at a party, and putting together the table of contents for a thesis, are all activities within activities. They are micro activities within particular macro activities. And, in each case above, the micro activity indicated combines with other micro activities to make up the macro activity. Putting, for example, is one of the many activities that, when taken together, comprise the game of golf.

(iii) Closed activities and open activities

A further point about activities, and one which will be very important for our ensuing discussion about formal schooling and curriculum, is this. Some macro activities are what I will call closed activities. They have fixedly official descriptions, principles and purposes which identify and limit the range of micro activities that can exist within the macro activity. The supra or macro activity is closed to the admission of new (micro) activities or deletion of present (micro) activities. In other words, there is a set and unalterable programme of micro activities which comprise the macro activity. (This is unchanged by the fact that constituting rules of either macro or micro activities are capable of being understood at various levels (depths) and that from the programme can be generated numerous informal rules, (including strategies, understandings, intimations, and the like). For such additions do not create new activities; only add to the complexity of our understanding of those already in existence.) Chess is a good example of a closed activity. No matter how one describes or re-describes (in logically equivalent terms at a minimum level) the game and its objectives the range of activities (those of defense and offense) remain constant; otherwise one is simply not playing the game known as chess.

Open activities, by contrast, are macro activities, but with a composition not completely restricted to standard micro units. Rather,

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[7]Conceivably, an activity which is a micro activity within a macro activity could, itself, possibly be construed as a macro activity for other sub or micro activities.

some degree of admission and deletion of micro activities is permissible. In some cases this is accounted for by the existence of looseness in the programme, particularly the description of the activity such that it is amenable to differing interpretations, each of which may have unique constituting structures. A parallel is well known in the analysis of some concepts such as 'democracy' or 'justice'.[8] This would be exemplified by, say, the activity of partying. Though A and B may share a basic understanding of the nature of a party and what procedures are characteristic - i.e. that it is an occasion for collective relaxation, entertainment and so on - each may plan for his party a collection of micro activities that differs from the other (e.g. drinks, dinner and dancing at A's party; coffee, cakes and conversation at B's party).

It warrants note here that looseness is not boundlessness. Parties may be as different from one another as one system of democracy or justice is from others; but parties are not football games or tennis matches, democracy is not absolutism, and justice is not tyranny. We all have, in common, a concept of party, democracy and justice. And because of this we can roughly agree on what counts as an instance of each of the above. Nevertheless, the concepts are vague, something which allows for considerable differences in interpretation.

Openness has another source. It could be expected to stem as well from activity programmes which stress aims and objectives without attending too closely to the means, or procedural rules, of accomplishing them. Hunting and fishing, for instance, are necessarily concerned with the attempted capture of prey; and to be sure, present technology, traditions, and resources suggest a range of means. But the specific activities can differ quite considerably. The macro activity of fishing can be comprised of micro activities such as those relevant to catching fish with nets, spears or rods.

Ironically, however, even open activities must be closed, if only provisionally. For a significant duration of time any activities must be considered to have a fixed programme of constituting activities, otherwise participants could never actually engage in a particular activity. If the procedural rules of fishing were not consistent for someone while he engaged in it on some occasion - if they were continually in flux - it would be hard to understand how the fisherman could be said to be engaged in the same activity from one moment to the next. That a collection of

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[8] See F. Waissman, 'Verifiability' (see 'open' texture) in The Theory of Meaning, G.H.R. Parkinson ed., (London: Oxford University Press, 1968).

activities must be provisionally fixed, however, does not mean that after suitable duration it cannot be altered. The fact that in certain kinds of activities there can be alterations whereas in others there cannot, is the distinguishing feature of open activities from closed.

This distinction of closed and open activities will be of considerable importance when discussing formal education. The latter is a macro activity, I will attempt to show; and open in virtue of both the looseness of its central description and the multiplicity of possible micro activities (hence multiplicity of constituting procedural rules). If this is true, the school decision-maker's problem is, of course, determining (a) what the programme, i.e. description, etc., of the macro activity is to be (given the ambiguities), (b) what micro activities will constitute the macro activity, (c) what actions will take place within the various micro activities. (Since activities and actions are rule governed, to establish the former is to establish the latter as well.)

(iv) Summary

To conclude the general analysis of activities, it might be helpful to reiterate some previous remarks about the part it plays in decision-making. Think of decision-making within the game of chess.

Legitimate chess moves must be sifted from random options, then a preferred alternative move extracted from the legitimate moves. Both normative operations require a knowledge of the constituting rules, for it is being optimally consistent with them that justifies the selections in each case. But it is not just the formal rules which justify decisions in chess: the informal rules such as strategies, understandings, sensitivities and intimations do as well; all of which can be generated from the game's programme, i.e. general descriptions, principles, and objectives. Hence, to the extent that one does not have a rule to justify each and every decision one must appeal to more abstract directives within the activity's structure; these being principles, objectives, and aims, which form part of the game's programme. But, as I mentioned at the end of the last section, the object-of-decision is not always about what to do within an activity. It could also be about what the activity should be as is the case, for example, when one decides what micro activities shall constitute an openly described macro activity. Here one is virtually making up the provisional rules of the macro activity - decisions which rely on an understanding of the general macro description and its aims, objectives, and principles. Clearly, competent decision-making both within and about activities depends upon one's understanding

of the details of, and within, an activity's structural categories.

(b) Contexts

More than simply knowledge of activity structure is important to decision-making. I want to show that it must be supplemented by an understanding of 'context'; and not always as just a pragmatic matter either. What is 'context' and how does it relate to activities and decision-making?

Roughly speaking, 'context' refers to the circumstances or framework within which something takes place. An argument in favour of the right to freedom of the press, for example, might take place in the context of a general discussion of civil and political liberties - the latter being the set of circumstances or general framework for the former. It is a rather vague notion; but I want to be more specific about it and treat it under two headings: conceptual and material contexts.

(i) Conceptual context

There may be a sense in which an activity may be said to have its own objective existence - perhaps because it has been officially recorded in some way. But, unquestionably, a human activity must exist in a rather more subjective way, in the minds of participants and other concerned parties. Chess and tennis, for example, can only be activities in which we do participate if they are understood; and understood in much the same way[9] by all. The possibility of such understanding is dependent upon participants and others having (a) a sufficient level of conceptual development (b) certain types of concept, and (c) certain specific concepts within these types. Any activity, say chess, could not be understood by an infant; nor could it be understood by someone who had no concept of a game; nor by someone who had no concept of the particular sort of game that chess is. On the latter, to know chess is to know (most of) its structure; and this in turn is dependent upon possession of certain concepts. It is this shared network of concepts (which presumes sufficient conceptual development) that I will call the conceptual context.

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[9] As I argued earlier, it is possible for some participants to understand the programme and procedures of an activity in greater depth and breadth than others. There is, however, some minimum level of understanding that must be shared.

To consider this more fully, take soccer as an example. Players (and others) would need to have a concept of a game - that it has a point, duration, rules; and is a team, or collective endeavour, involving good sportsmanship, strategy, skills, balls, passing, shooting, scoring, and so on. This would not necessarily be comprehended by people from a culture which played no games as we know them.

Equally, these concepts, themselves, presuppose further and more basic concepts. Team play, to take one of these, is built on the notion that an individual is able to see himself as part of a collective effort, not simply as a unit. This is an elementary social concept; and good sportsmanship would be another.

In addition, scientific concepts, or beliefs about the natural world, underlie human activities. One would suppose that modern day olympic competitors understand their events rather differently than the ancient Greeks who felt that much of their fortunes depended upon help from the Gods. And much of Alice's frustration with the game of croquette in Lewis Carroll's Through the Looking Glass stemmed from an understanding, or rather misunderstanding, of the absurd natural world in which she found herself.

My claim, therefore, is that an activity exists for its participants and other concerned parties relative to how they understand it. So when their subjective comprehension is shared and is the same as, or logically equivalent to, the objective or standard conception of the activity in question, then at least one condition has been fulfilled for the activity taking place. Furthermore, this shared understanding is a common knowledge of the activity's structure. And what makes this possible or, correspondingly, impossible, is the conceptual context of the activity, i.e. the conceptual network concerned with activities in general, the one in question, the social world and the natural world. In short, a compatible conceptual context is an a priori condition for an activity to be understood and to take place.

(ii) Material context

One could not create a characteristic (practical) human activity which would not take place in space, time, utilize resources and involve human personality, events, needs, motivation, etc. Even if this activity never actually took place, one could not conceive of it without having in mind (standard) conditions of space, time, resource and psychology. These are the material conditions for given facts about an activity. For instance, chess games are located in some physical surroundings, have duration (though often unspecified), require physical resources such as

the playing equipment (e.g. a board, pieces, and perhaps tables, chairs, lighting, a building, heat, etc.) and human resources such as energy to think and act and time which could have been used to do something else, and the inclination to participate and desire to win. Could a soccer game be conceivable without a field, a time span, equipment and the motivation or inclination to play?

The categories (i.e. space, time, resources, and human psychology) are a priori conditions. And to some extent this is true of particular times, resources, etc. which are relevant to specified activities. For example, chess conceptually requires a board and pieces. Many other specifications, however, which fall into these categories may not be a priori conditions, but given some collection of facts about such things as the quantity and quality of the resources and the psychological state of other participants, other specification of space, time, resources etc. may become pragmatic necessities if the participation is to be competent, or even if the activity is to take place at all. For example, decisions about tactics and technique in a soccer game may be affected by the condition of the field (e.g. a slippery turf would preclude one from making very sharp turns). Indeed, given certain facts about the field condition on some occasion, the activity may not be possible - logically possible, but not practically. Equally, a hostess, in order to have a successful party, may have to be tolerant and polite to an obnoxious or boring guest - practical necessities to do with psychological facts in the activity's context. Decision-making, it follows, is very much dependent upon material circumstances for given instances of an activity. How we participate, and even whether we participate, is either logically or practically linked to material context.

(c) Contexts and Activities

This concludes the analysis of context. It remains for us to explore its relationship with activities. This will be done under two headings.

(i) Consistency and compatibility

First, elements of the context must be consistent, and as well be of constant duration not just while the activity is in progress on a particular occasion but as long as the activity exists under its standard programme. In other words, the way in which, for example, a soccer game is understood (conceptual context) and the social, psychological and economic facts about participants and their environment such as the

condition of the field, ball, uniforms and weather (material context) must not be internally contradictory (e.g. a ball and goal posts but no field) and they must not change significantly while the proceedings are going on.

Second, the relationship between the activity and elements of context must be one of compatibility. Clearly, the activity cannot proceed according to its standard description unless facts about material circumstances and participants are conducive to it. If the player's attitudes and weather are not compatible with normal game conditions and if their views about the world are too much at variance with those necessary to conceive of the game in some way that is logically equivalent to its initial conception, then incompatibility prevents the activity from continuing.

(ii) Contextual plurality and static and dynamic contexts

This discussion of consistency of context and compatibility between context and activity leads us on to the final, yet very important, remarks I want to make about context. From the standpoint of context-activity compatibility, something which we have just claimed to be essential to the procedure of an activity on a given occasion and a priori necessary to the conception of the activity at all, a static, i.e. unchanging, context for all instances (i.e. times and places) of the activity being carried on, would seem ideal - as long as maximum context-activity compatibility existed at the outset, of course. Both conceptual and material contexts are susceptible to change over time, however. Facts change and so do general beliefs about the world and activity-specific theories: contexts are potentially dynamic (i.e. changeable) over time. Furthermore, insofar as activities can be carried on in different locations and by individuals with different conceptual schemes and views about the world, at any given time there can be what I will call contextual plurality.[10] Now, an indefinite variety of contextual facts and theories can

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[10] Cultural diversity usually accounts for this. For an informative discussion of the resurgence of cultural diversity in the United States see Richard Pratte, 'Cultural Diversity and Education' in K.A. Strike and K. Egan eds., Ethics and Educational Policy (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978). It is interesting to note that the American tradition with regard to cultural diversity has been to create a single and uniquely American culture (largely through education). The famous metaphor has been the 'American melting pot'. Canada, on the other hand, has traditionally endeavoured to retain and protect its cultural diversity and has thought of this in terms of the metaphor 'Canadian mosaic'.

be compatible with the existence of an activity to be sure: soccer can be played in the rain and on artificial turf just as in the sun and on grass, and many different views about the world and the activity are conducive to play. But too much dynamic shift or eccentric contextual plurality and the vital compatibility is lost, with the result being disastrous for the existence of the activity, either pragmatically or conceptually depending on whether the offending contextual element is material or conceptual.

(d) Context and Decision-Making

How does context, as we have characterized it here, affect decision-making? At risk of obviousness and slight repetition, I want to reiterate that a necessary condition of one's understanding an activity is that the conceptual context be consistent with the standard description of the activity, and that a pragmatically necessary condition of an activity being gone ahead with on a given occasion is the compatibility of the material context with it. Decision-making, within an activity, therefore, is logically dependent upon conceptual context and is, or should be, influenced by matters of fact. On the latter: one's decision to kick the soccer ball in such a way that one is moving at right angles to the ball presumes the existence of a number of material conditions, among which, in this case, would be that the turf is not too slippery to permit such a manoeuvre. The decision-maker's ignorance of important elements of context in this case (i.e. degree of shift in dynamic context) could frustrate performance of the activity - he could fall without having even touched the ball. Clearly, the material context is important to decision-making in an activity with regard to making reasoned choices about <u>how</u>, and <u>where</u> to engage in the activity. It seems to me, as well, that it should have a strong bearing upon one's decision <u>whether or not</u> even to participate in the activity. Poor lighting and insufficient heat in the room may be enough to warrant postponing the chess match.

Remembering our earlier mention of contextual shift and differentiation, the former in terms of contextual dynamism and the latter of contextual plurality, decision-making within different instances of the same activity may well have different outcomes simply because of context variation. If, over time, material context alters drastically then engagement in an activity may become impossible, perhaps ever again. Similarly, if concepts vital to the activity were to change, the activity could no longer be made sense of and decision-making about it

would end. Equally, contextual plurality presents similar sorts of problems, the difference being that instead of the context of different instances of an activity changing over time, it differs as between locations. Think of the material and conceptual differences between professional soccer and that which is played by young boys in the school yard.

Our concern with context in decision-making about open activities is greater in some respects than with closed activities because in the former we are not just occupied by matters of how to participate in the activity or whether to do it at all, but also with what micro activities ought to be included in the macro activity, a factor which is absent in closed activities. In open activities, therefore, a decision-maker who is concerned about the composition of a macro activity, either in the general case or in specific instances, might think the material context incompatible with certain micro activities, as when a camper who is catching fish for food decides that his equipment and bait and the location are more conducive to fly fishing than trawlling, or that the conceptual context is incompatible with a certain micro activity, as in the case of a meteorologist rejecting cosmological means of predicting weather as part of his general methodology (macro activity). Also, an open activity decision-maker who, intending that his macro activity contain all, and only, those micro activities which will maximize the likelihood of achieving certain ends which are derived from the aims of the macro activity, i.e. treating the function of micro activities as means to ends, might choose to include or exclude alternative micro activities in, or from, the composite whole on the grounds of their utility in terms of achieving the desired ends, something which would depend heavily on the material context. That is, facts about participants and their material circumstances would be significant factors in determining whether or not an activity of a given description would be useful in bringing about an overall end.

In the next chapter I want to carry this discussion into the realm of education. My intention will be to demonstrate that education can be seen as an <u>open macro activity</u>. And, in treating it this way we are able to see the form of the knowledge which decision-makers must have in order to make competent decisions about and within the activity and activities of education: this will prove to have been made possible by our having analysed the formal structure of activities generally and observed the importance of contextual elements to decisions about activities.

Chapter IV

ACTIVITIES AND CONTEXTS (2): EDUCATION AS AN ACTIVITY

1. Is Education an Activity?

R.S. Peters claims in many places[1] that education is not an activity. It may involve activities, though none in particular, but it is not itself an activity. Rather, education is a concept from which can be generated two sets of criteria. One of these puts forth the conditions that would have to be met if some action or activity is to be judged to be educational, and the other functions similarly as a measuring stick for being educated. A note to make here is that he thinks it important when considering the concept of education to distinguish between a pre-nineteenth century use that still lingers and the richer current understanding.[2] The former would hold 'education' to mean anything from the mundane training involved in child-rearing to instruction in school; and that latter would pertain to the twentieth century ideal of the all-round development of a person morally, intellectually and spiritually. It is the latter that will concern us. So, education generates two criteria in virtue of which one could answer the question 'Are these activities educational?' and 'Is this person educated?'. Education is like reform in this regard. For according to Peters, the activities, participation in which would bring about reformation, and the state of being a reformed person, would both be determined by appeal to the two sets of criteria stemming from the meaning of reform. Equally, reform is not itself an activity, though, to be sure, activities of some sort are involved in reforming.

An interesting point about this measuring stick account of education is that the two sets of criteria for 'educational' and 'being educated' are themselves external[3] to whatever processes or activities

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[1] See Ethics and Education (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1966), 'Aims of Education - a conceptual inquiry' (with replies by J. Woods and W.H. Dray) in R.S. Peters ed., The Philosophy of Education (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), and 'Values in Education (2)' in Glenn Langford and D.J. O'Connor New Essays in the Philosophy of Education.

[2] See 'Education and the Educated Man', Proceedings of the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain, Vol. IV, 1970.

[3] Peters, in 'What is an Educational Process?' (in R.S. Peters ed., The Concept of Education (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967)) comments about 'education' that 'its standards are intrinsic to it'. (p. 2, my emphasis). There is no inconsistency though. He is

are involved e.g. schooling and the activities within. That is, we could ask of any school activities or school graduate: 'Was that really an educational activity?' and 'Is he really educated?'. This is possible, once again, because the criteria are external to schooling.

So it is Peters' contention that (a) education is a criterion (having two parts) and (b) education is not an activity. I disagree completely with (b) and have strong reservations about the utility of (a).

Concerning (a), it seems to me quite true to say that the concept of education generates the two criteria outlined by Peters. After all, it is doubtless apparent to most of us that a jibbering idiot is not an educated person and a poker game is not, on the face of it, an educational activity. We are able to tell these things because we do share, more or less, the same concept of education and corresponding criteria. If we did not, we could never agree on who was educated and what was educational. However, the concept of education that we all share is so vague that it helps us sort out only the most obvious cases. We can tell, for example, that someone who is broadly knowledgeable, numerate, literate, and inclines to rational assessment of important matters is, on the face of it, educated and that someone who is none of the above is, in all likelihood, uneducated. For our concept of education, as it is, would enable us to build up a set of criteria which, if satisfied by individuals measured against them, would enable us to pronounce him educated, perhaps even an exemplary case of the educated person. But the problem is, what items on the list are absolutely essential? And to what extent could we substitute other items? Since we normally attach the labels of educated and educational to such a wide range of instances it is very difficult to compose a list of criteria, from our vague concept of education, that has logically necessary (or even generally characteristic) items; unless of course we want to stipulate. In other words, we do not all agree on what counts as an ideally educated person.

For example, consider these criteria for being educated set out by Peters.[4] An educated person (1) pursues some worthwhile activities;

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here, saying that the criteria, or standards, are intrinsic to the concept of education. But Peters also thinks that the concept of education from which the criteria are generated is itself external to any particular activity that one might suggest as being an educational activity. That is, if one thought of an activity that might be educationally beneficial, one would verify this by asking whether or not it satisfied the criteria. (The same goes, of course, for 'being educated'.)

[4]Among the many places these are set out see 'Aims of Education - a conceptual inquiry' in R.S. Peters ed., The Philosophy of Education

and for their own sake (2) possesses some body of knowledge; not just facts but an understanding of the principles for the organization of those facts (3) must be broadly knowledgeable, not just narrowly specialized (4) must be transformed, in outlook, by what he knows. Now, if one conjures up an image of someone who fulfills these conditions, unquestionably one would have in mind an educated person - given the way we usually employ the term. Still, it seems quite reasonable to question the necessity of some of these, and the completeness of the list.

The problems that this analysis has had to face are well known.[5] But, even Peters' attempted solution, i.e. the construal of 'being educated' as a post-nineteenth century ideal, does not help. For the simple fact still remains that not everyone agrees on what an ideally educated person would be. For instance, one could say that, as against (1), some people are purely instrumental in the use of knowledge. The pragmatist and behaviourist, both of whom take a problem-solving approach toward education, would surely think it ideal that a student became skilled at using knowledge. The writings of Dewey and Skinner do not seem to attend much to 'knowledge for its own sake' as in any way ideal. Also, some of us might find something unsatisfactory about an individual who learns a great deal about, for example, literature solely for the purpose of impressing others with his knowledge and the same applies to someone teaching subjects he hates. Nevertheless, it is not at all obvious that such individuals are not educated. It seems like the wrong grounds on which to criticize them. For such individuals we would be rather more inclined to say that their education had only instrumental value - not that they are uneducated.

About (3) one could say quite rightly that there is no inconsistency in thinking of a specialist as educated (e.g. a mathematical genius whose interest in other fields is nugatory). Why is it more convincing to portray broad knowledge as an ideal? Would we say to the brilliant mathematician who loves his work and who is advancing his field greatly that he ought to broaden his knowledge even at the expense of happiness and time spent on and benefits to mathematics if he wants to be thought of as educated?

There is, too, the sort of objection that John Woods raises[6] in a

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(London: Oxford University Press, 1973) with replies by J. Woods and W. H. Dray. Since I wrote this Peters has quite radically changed his view. See 'Democratic values and Educational Aims', Teachers College Record, February, 1979.

[5] The responses of Woods and Dray to Peters are examples.

[6] Ibid.

reply to Peters that something would have to be added to the analysis to do with actually becoming competent in the disciplines studied. And then, of course, there is the problem that both Woods and William Dray[7] raise about the content of what is studied and whether or not it is worthwhile, given that views about this could differ. This is an important point because some people contend that being educated entails being literate, numerate and educated broadly among the disciplines (i.e. generally educated); while others might quite happily count as educated someone who had virtually no formal introduction to the disciplines but who was a good craftsman, or alternatively knew about sculpture, painting, film-making and art history. In the latter case, such an individual might be seen as not only educated but cultured and refined even though he knew next to nothing about literature, chemistry, biology and math. It is even possible, certainly on some versions of the free school conception of education, that an individual might be unable either to read, write or calculate with proficiency, but knows a great deal about art, crafts, folklore and perhaps even the disciplines themselves. Moreover, it is even conceivable that an individual might be said to be educated, though illiterate and ignorant of the disciplines, if he were very wise and 'worldly'.

The point of saying all of this is, of course, that the concept of an educated person can be stretched quite considerably, and trying to pull it into one shape or another by appealing to ordinary language use of the word is not very helpful. What counts as ideal in education is a matter of judgment in which there is not widespread agreement. Professor Peters trades on a preferred conception. The problem with 'education' as a criterion is that the concept is too vague to indicate with clarity and precision the items that ought to be on the list of criteria. There is, however, a way of improving the situation. It would be to start with a concept less vague, and from which criteria can be more easily derived. Schooling is that concept. By schooling here I mean the ways in which a society or part of it initiates its young into the main cognitive skills, modes of understanding, and so forth, which it takes to be of central importance.

To say that X is educated is usually to claim that X has gone to school. This, rather than the vague concept of education, is the orthodox use of the word 'education'. 'To educate', according to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, is 'to provide with schooling'. And when we ask

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[7] Ibid.

'Are you educated?' the expected reply is something like 'Of course. I was educated at Eton', 'Harrow', 'a comprehensive', or some other reference to a school, or schooling in general. Clearly, the word education can be used in a referring sense - to refer to formal education or schooling. And, since our concern is with curriculum decision-making, and decisions about curriculum have to do with schools, our concern is, surely, with schools. So, when we ask whether education is an activity, what we really want to know is whether schooling is an activity.

To this point, however, we have not been discussing education in this referring sense. Instead we have been considering the possibility that education can be said to pick out two sets of criteria. There is certainly something to this view, but the inordinate vagueness of the concept seems to leave it without much substance. This seems to be so much the case that I am rather inclined to suggest we abandon the attempt to characterize education thus and <u>stipulate</u> a definition in terms of schooling - a concept whose boundaries are much easier to make clear.

There are a number of other reasons why we might be well advised to consider abandoning a characterization of education in favour of schooling. For one thing, when one thinks of how to characterize the concept of education it is almost as though one thinks about the different forms of schooling - grammar schooling, comprehensive schooling, free schooling, religious schooling, military schooling and so on - and asks what they all have in common with regard to aims and objectives. The concept of education is filled out by some compilation of these. Something that lends support to this is the fact that the various forms of schooling, that is to say their activity programmes - i.e. descriptions, aims, principles, etc. - seem to have <u>a</u> concept (not <u>the</u> universal concept) of education. In other words, embedded within the philosophies of the various forms or types of schooling are notions of what sorts of activities ought properly to be part of those types of schooling and what sorts of graduates those types of schooling ought to produce. It is these <u>internal</u> criteria - internal to the type of schooling in question - from which we draw in trying to characterize education in general. In short, the concept of education is a generalization from the more particularized concepts of schooling, within the programmes of the various forms or types (theories or philosophies) of schooling. And what makes the items that are put together in the general concept of education at least to some extent compatible is the fact that we seem to have an overall concept of

'schooling' in some degree of conformity with which we find the sub-concepts of free schooling, grammar schooling and so forth. The problem is that there simply is not enough unity to constitute a rich (external) notion of education.

A point of clarification that we should make about the concept of schooling before we go any further is that what we are discussing is the very idea of types of schooling. We are not talking about the instances - the schools themselves. So, in the case of free schooling, we can say that this type of schooling has a programme from which can be derived two sets of criteria: one criterion is used to determine which activities ought properly to be found in such schools, and the other criterion is used to pick out the desired qualities of someone who has been schooled in this mode. These, of course, are the counter-parts to 'educational' and 'being educated'. Now, notice that the criteria are <u>internal</u> to the particular type of schooling in question, but <u>external</u> to the actual schools, activities and individuals to be evaluated.[8]

This, of course, leaves us with a problem. If we line up the various types of schooling beside one another, do we not require further criteria that are <u>external</u> to those types of schooling in order to choose among them as to which are <u>the most educational</u>? Answering this question returns us to the original problem. Where are these criteria to be found? We have already decided that an ordinary language analysis of the concept of education yields criteria too vague to be helpful - criteria that, for the most part, come from taking a synoptic view of the various types of schooling. So if there is to be an <u>external</u> criterion - external to schooling - and surely there must be

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[8] Note here that within a particular type of schooling, (i.e. within a particular macro activity) there is a programme in which is included various principles etc. which set forth 'the concept' of that type of schooling. It could be said, I suppose, that from this 'concept' there could be developed criteria of 'education' and 'being educated' (in the particular mode of schooling under consideration) in virtue of which the various procedures and micro activities could be judged. The criterion would thus be <u>external</u> to the micro activities etc. However, there is something odd about speaking of it this way because both the 'criteria' and the micro activities would be <u>internal</u> to the macro activity. It would be like a golfer who, after (engaging in the micro activity of) putting, asks himself whether that was really an activity of golf by appealing to the criterion of golf generated by the programme of the game. True, the programme here gives legitimacy to the procedures. But when we speak of golf we are not simply thinking of the programme, or the concepts and criteria that can be generated from it; we are thinking of the whole activity of golf. The same is true with formal education. So, when Peters says that 'education' is rather like 'reform', it picks out no particular activity or process. Rather it lays down criteria to which activities or processes must conform. (<u>Ethics and Education</u>, op. cit., p. 25). He is only identifying a part of it.

if we are ever to make choices among the types of schooling, then the criteria will have to be generated by an assortment of principles, such as social equality, freedom, individual and social needs, rationality and so forth. Of course, since these principles, and applications of them, are controversial, there seems to be little hope of a universally acceptable criterion here either.

Returning then to the concepts of education and schooling: What I am suggesting is that we simply put aside our attempt to characterize education, and work instead on schooling. It is less vague because it refers to visible social institutions; the various concepts of types of schooling seem to have in them conceptualizations of, as it were, 'education'; and our attempts to characterize education in a general way seem to draw on the various notions of schooling. What I am asking for is a transfer of attention from education to schooling. I am not saying, however, and we must be clear on this point, that education and schooling are synonomous. After all, we do speak of people who are educated but not schooled, e.g., a parent who teaches a child at home rather than sending him to school. Also, we do say that individuals can be schooled but not educated, e.g., a child who attends school but does not learn. And, there is the Illich point that schools are anti-educational. What I would say about this, however, is that the two notions are not as far apart as they might seem. For, if I am right, the concept of education does not have much substance: it is parasitic on schooling. I see no reason why home-education could not be characterized as a form of schooling. If all forms of schooling had to be identical with the familiar state or private schools in order to count as schooling, new forms such as free schooling could never count as schooling. As well, if we say that X has been to school but not educated, we could well say that he is not properly schooled - that he has not met the criteria of a successfully schooled person, criteria that are, as we saw, generated by the programme of the type of schooling in question. X has attended a school but not been schooled in the aforementioned sense. (This is similar to saying that X has been to an educational institution but has not been (properly) educated.) And, finally, Illich's claim that schools are anti-educational can be handled by saying that the activities in such schools do not meet the conditions of proper schooling activities as specified by the programme of that type of schooling. In other words, individual schools can be evaluated by criteria external to them but internal to the, as it were, theory of schooling of which they are instances. (Again, this is like saying that such and such an activity takes place in educational institution A,

but it is not educational.)

In sum, my view is that (a) 'education' is too weak - too vague - a concept to generate useful criteria, (b) that 'schooling' and the various sub-concepts of types of schooling are stronger and more useful (c) that most of the substance of the concept of education comes from the concept of schooling and (d) that in view of these points we ought to transfer our attention to 'schooling' from 'education' and therefore we should stipulate that what we will mean by 'education' is formal education, i.e., schooling. So, in response to Peters' claim (a) that education is a criterion, it seems that he is partly right.

Assertion (b) is that education is not an activity. This would be true if the only interpretation for the word 'education' were the criterion account that Peters outlines; but this is not the only (non trivial) meaning - indeed it is rather an eccentric one. Normally, as mentioned earlier, it refers to schooling. And, to ask what type of education someone has had is to query the type of school attended. So, is schooling an activity?

An activity, it was argued, is composed of actions; and this composite entity has a structure. It has a programme, i.e. descriptions, explanations, aims, purposes and principles, which draws together and conceptualizes the activity, and it has procedures, i.e. formal and informal rules that guide, direct and regulate performance. A macro activity is composed of micro activities, the former and the latter having the same relationship between them as between a simple activity and its composite actions. Education, by which we mean schooling, has this structure. Though different types of school, e.g. comprehensives and free schools, have different programmes and procedures, they are macro activities with constituent micro activities.

It would be pointless to work out the details, but one could imagine a standard sort of description and explanation of comprehensive schooling that would include general and uncontroversial statements about aims and principles, and from which could be generated sets of criteria about what would count as a legitimate educational activity and what sort of qualities an educated person should have - all from the point of view of comprehensive schooling. In sum, this would constitute the programme of comprehensive schooling and would be that which ties together and makes sense of the various activities that take place within the school over the duration of a student's tenure. And as for how the students and teachers are to conduct themselves with regard to both the overall macro activity and various micro activities, there are sundry rules. Rules

of the micro activities, say history projects, would flow from the programme if the study of history, a micro activity, and would be consistent with the programme and procedures (rules) of comprehensive schooling - i.e. the macro activity. Consequently, I would agree with Glenn Langford[9] who stipulated education to be schooling and feels that it is an activity for reasons that are very similar to mine.

In a reply[10] to Langford's article 'Values in Education (1)', Peters voices objections to the claim that education is an activity. Given the similarity of Langford's view to mine, Peters' objections apply to my view as well. In responding to Peters, my strategy, for the most part, will be to show that if he is willing to view education as schooling, in light of the vagueness of 'education', then many of the objections to education as an activity fall away.

Peters' first point is that activities may conjoin to promote an overall end without there being a supra (macro) activity. Reforming, corrupting, boring, or interesting someone are examples, he suggests. It seems to me quite correct to say that a number of random activities may, collectively, have a certain consequence; and that in such a case there is no macro activity. As well, I would agree that individuals could select a number of activities in which they or others might engage, mindful of the consequences, without there being, thereby, created a macro activity. After all, as an example of the former, one could imagine the proverbial naif from the country who came to London unmindful of its corrupting influences, whereupon she fell in with bad company, partied late, drank heavily, gambled to excess, and was frequently seduced. Obviously there is no macro activity called 'corruption' in this. Nor, with the latter case in mind, would we say that any such supra-(macro) activity existed or was being engaged in even if the young girl was coming to London to participate in the aforementioned activities in the hope of being corrupted! But formal schooling is not much like either of these cases. It is not a random collection of activities that just happen to have a particular consequence, nor is it a series of activities engaged in because of an anticipated consequence. In accordance with the account of 'activities' given earlier, it is an elaborate and systematic programme of descriptions, aims, objectives, and purposes

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[9]See 'The Concept of Education' and 'Values in Education (1)' in Glenn Langford and D.J. O'Connor eds., New Essays in the Philosophy of Education, op. cit.

[10]See 'Values in Education (2)' in Langford and O'Connor, op. cit.

which generate procedural rules and in virtue of which various (micro) activities are selected and timetabled; all of which is carried out within an institutional framework. Not a bit like corruption; but very much like the characteristics of an intentionally structured activity e.g. a sport or a board game.

Second, a related point Peters makes is that, apart from intended or unintended consequences, having an intention or aim that links certain activities does not necessarily thereby create a new overall activity; otherwise consciousness of conservation, for example, in a range of activities would create the new (macro) supra activity known as the conservation activity. Once again, Peters is quite right to point this out, but mistaken in thinking that it would rule out of court the claim that 'education, qua schooling', is an activity. The reason is similar to that given above. Schooling is not just disparate activities with a common theme. As I said before, it is a programme of activities, conceived as a unity, and into which micro activities must fit; not the other way around as would be the case with conservation.

In a further aspect of the same point he maintains that one could identify activities in such things as the corruption of someone that are independent of any thoughts in the minds of the participants that they are engaged in 'corrupting'. For instance, in the earlier example of the young girl coming to London, she may participate in an activity such as party-going without any awareness that it is part of her corruption. Similarly, a student could engage in classroom activities attending only to the immediate concerns and without being aware of being educated in the process. The point is, of course, that if one is engaged in a genuine activity then one would be continually aware of the fact that present activities are part of the whole.

In reply one could, I suppose, say that it is not at all inconceivable that one might lose sight of the enterprise as a whole for the sake of immediate concerns in any activity - even soccer. But more to the point would be that Peters' criticism has force only if one adopts his interpretation of education. It is true, after all, that the state of being educated may be arrived at by engaging in activities which are not seen as directed to that end. On the other hand, if education is construed as a formal programme of activities - i.e. schooling, the objection does not come to much. Students and teachers may forget that they are engaged in a macro activity with specifiable ends etc., but surely the awareness that it is all part of schooling is not too far off. A soccer player may, for a time, be totally preoccupied with the activity of dribbling around an opponent; but the idea of being in a soccer game

and trying to win soon comes back.

A third point is that activities usually have a range of specific acts. In cooking, for instance, one works with utensils, mixes ingredients, and so on, with definite intentions to bring about a certain end. Educating, he claims, can be accomplished not only by a great variety of activities such as visits to the library or seeing films (which apparently do not comprise a 'standard corpus' of sub activities as in cooking), but it also can be done by individuals who have no intention of educating. To respond: first, if there are standard actions (and micro activities) in cooking then surely this is true of schooling. There are classrooms, time-tables, lessons, projects and field trips, staff meetings, etc. enough to match the corpus of standard actions in cooking. But if Peters means here that an exhaustive list of cooking actions (and activities) could be prepared, but not in education, then he must be mistaken. For surely one could think of as many bizarre ways of getting food prepared (from the use of microwave oven to the waving of a wand) as of educating. Second, to say that cooking is always intentional but educating is not, simply will not do. If the film-maker 'educates' unintentionally then so does the 'arsonist cook' as he sets a house ablaze wherein the Sunday joint of beef sits raw on the kitchen table! There is something unsatisfactory, however, about placing great emphasis on cases of unintentional cooking or educating because it is quite clear that both cooks and teachers are central characters in their respective activities, not arsonists or film-makers, and that both do what they do intentionally, in general.

His fourth major point is that education depends upon, among other things, the state of readiness of the learner. Education is a transaction which requires of the student adequate cognitive development and prior learning. Presumably, this makes education not an activity because characteristic activities either are not transactional or do not depend upon a state of readiness of participants. But surely board games such as Monopoly are transactional and dependent upon an adequate level of cognitive development and a knowledge of the rules. And surely soccar players must be in a state of readiness - i.e. know the rules, be physically fit and have the right equipment. So, I see no reason why either the transactional nature of education or the fact that participants must be in a state of readiness rules out education as an activity.

The fifth and final of his points is that activities characteristically have definite durations: they begin and top by prior arrangement as do soccer games or when the participants decide to stop as with

parties or school field trips. It seems quaint, he thinks, to say 'stop your educating at three o'clock'. But, given that education is defined as participation in some form of institutional practice, it does not seem quaint in the least. When school lets out for the day, formal education stops.

Peters concludes, against Langford, that construing education as an activity can have the positive result of focussing attention on 'aims' but, on the negative side, can veil the importance of (a) looking for unintended outcomes (b) standing back to assess the overall endeavour and (c) concern for the learner's part in the process. These points I find unconvincing and want to show them to be unwarranted fears. Later, however, I will mention some of the benefits that accrue to regarding education as an activity.

First, nothing prevents us from standing back from an activity so as to observe unintended outcomes and to assess the merits and dismerits of the activity - perhaps in the light of such outcomes. Is not hooliganism an unintended outcome of public soccer matches which, in the extreme, might incline us, by way of assessing the overall desirability of (the activity of) public soccer matches, to have them stopped? And is not one of the arguments against (the macro activity of) the grammar school that it has the unintended outcome of promoting elitism and inequality of education opportunity, and that on such grounds, among others, it ought not to continue? Hence, (a) and (b) are unconvincing. As for (c): why should our attention be deflected from children where the whole point of the activity is to do with their cognitive and affective well being?

2. Is Education an Open Activity?

We have, so far, been rather cavalier in treating various types of schooling as legitimately under the umbrella of the activity of schooling. Justification comes in seeing that schooling is properly characterized as an open activity.

Activities can be open, we said, if their descriptions are loose enough to accommodate different interpretations, or if their descriptions prescribe the (other aspects of) programme of the activity but not the procedures. Schooling[11] is open in virtue of both. It is open for the

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[11] I am not, of course, claiming that schooling is a word that we can make mean anything we want it to. To be loose, and hence open to varying interpretations, is not to be boundless. Schooling may be grammar, comprehensive or free, but it is not driving a car or playing golf.

first reason because insofar as 'schooling' is to some extent confined by an antecedent external concept of education, which, as we have seen, is very vague, there are many possible descriptions of schooling. Even the Peters criterion is compatible with grammar schools, freeschools and military academies. Alternatively, if we start by requesting a characterization of schooling (either with or without concern for the external concept of education) we are faced once again with ambiguity. Grammar schools, comprehensive schools, community schools, and so on are all legitimately called schools (problem cases excepted); but in programme, they are manifestly different. Schooling is an open activity for the second reason because even once a particular type of schooling has been settled upon and even if a particular programme has been established, there are an indefinite number of different activities (hence procedures) that could be generated. For instance, discovery learning and formal lecturing are both compatible with, say, the grammar school concept.

Now, of course, it is within the realms of possibility that at some time in the future we might all agree that a particular type of schooling with a specified range of micro activities is right and proper, and that would make education a <u>closed</u> activity. But it would only be a provisional closing. For the possibility would always remain that at some time the unanimity of our agreement would cease, either about programme or procedures, in which case the openness would be transparent once again.

3. <u>Educational Contexts</u>

Since to this point, the discussion of context has been rather abstract and exemplified only by references other than to do with education, it might be useful to give a brief sketch of the conceptual and material contexts in education.

(a) Conceptual Context

Recall that the capability of understanding activity <u>A</u> is dependent upon participants (and others) (a) having attained a level of conceptual development such that they are capable of following rules and seeing them as part of a unified whole (b) possessing concepts that are specific to <u>A</u> (c) possessing concepts that form the backdrop of understanding the nature of an activity <u>per se</u>. This framework within which <u>A</u> is understood, and which is necessary for <u>A</u> to be understood is the

conceptual context. It is an environment of ideas that must be shared, at least to some degree, by all competent participants.

The very fact of schooling being a macro activity makes it fully comprehensible only to those who have an understanding of collections of activities coherently strung together by a programme and governed by rules. Think of the concepts needed to filter the statement just made! Then, of course, schooling is not just an activity, but an activity of a certain sort. It is a practical and social endeavour, with aims and objectives focused on learning and understanding. As well, activities of this sort can be of different types - e.g. free schools, comprehensives, and the like. And, within these macro activities are micro activities; activities which vary considerably. To understand, one must have the general concept of an activity, the specific concepts and the network of concepts that provide the foundation for specific and general activity concepts, namely social, scientific, ethical, etc. concepts.

As an example think of history students from a comprehensive school taking a day-trip to some historical sight. One reason for the students being asked to undertake the study of history (a micro activity) at all is probably something that stems from or at least must be consistent and compatible with, the macro activity programme of comprehensive schooling - more specifically, that part of the conception of schooling that explains what a proper schooling experience should entail (i.e. part of what comprehensive educators think is necessary for being an educated person). Within the micro activity, the study of history, is this field trip which, in turn, must be seen as consistent and compatible with the programme of the study of history. Then, too, the trip has to be understood in its own right. The children must see the point to the trip, i.e. understand what they are seeing and be able to relate it to the rest of the course. Furthermore, students must conduct themselves in certain ways, according to certain rules. There may be regulations about how they are to move from place to place, when and in what manner to speak to one another and to the teacher, and so on. All of this, and there is much more of course, can only be understood within a compatible conceptual framework. None of it, for instance, would make sense to a student who misconceived the idea of a field trip. One student might think of it as a holiday rather than part of a history course; and another, perhaps a very young one, might think of it as akin to abduction insofar as he or she is being taken away from the familiar surroundings of the school to an unknown place. As well, a student who thought of the venture as political propaganda (e.g. shining up the national image of a decadent and corrupt society) or one whose state of

alienation was such that he could not bring himself to see any compulsory school activity as other than virtual imprisonment, could not be a genuine participant in the activity.

It is important to mention here that the conceptual context can shift. That is, the web of concepts that enable us to think of schooling activities as we do, can change. One example of this is that due to shifting notions of social decorum in Western societies the rules of some schooling activities have come to be seen in a new light. Social relations between adults and children, for instance, are now less formal than they were two decades ago. One consequence of this is that children are not always seen as unmannerly if they address teachers by their first names rather than the former militaristic 'Sir' or 'Madam' - so relevant rules shift from being seen as quite fair and proper to being less so, and perhaps even intolerable. As well, children, particularly in North America and Scandanavia, are being seen more and more as having rights to freedom of choice. To a large degree, the free schooling movement has been fuelled by this. Furthermore, the rights accorded to children are coming to include legal right to such things as free speech.[12] As a result, certain forms of traditional schooling have become more difficult to operate, as a practical matter, because they are no longer seen in the same light as they once were. With significant amounts of shifts, as one could well imagine, certain forms of school could simply wither away.

There is another way in which conceptual shift can occur, and it is due to the very nature of schooling. Children spend as much as twelve or thirteen years in school so it is not hard to see that their conceptual schemes develop and mature. Consequently their understanding of the activity changes as they get older. This, however, does not alter the fact that they are engaged in the same activity for the duration. For their concepts do not change away from those that comprise the programme and rules, they deepen. As well, the activity, by its very purpose is designed to accommodate the change.

Equally, considerable plurality of conceptual context is compatible with educational activities. Within a given comprehensive, say, there may be children of many nationalities whose world view (religions, moral, social, and scientific) differs from one another. The same applies to social class differences. However, if the plurality is too great, it

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[12] See K.A. Strike 'Philosophical Reflections on Tinker vs. Des Moines' in Philosophy of Education 1974: Proceedings of the Philosophy of Education Society (Edwardsville, Ill.: Southern Illinois University, 1974).

becomes impossible for the activity to continue. Discrepant viewpoints can only be compatible with a given activity to a certain level after which time it is impossible to say that participants are all engaging in more or less the same activity.

(b) Material Context

Of logical necessity, conceiving of a particular activity requires provision for space, time, resources, and other participants. Characteristic practical activities are not conceivable and cannot take place without these. However, not only are these a priori conditions of an activity, but they are practical necessities as well. For if an activity is actually to take place the particular facts of space, time, etc. must be compatible. In other words, within categories these are the material circumstances that actually exist on particular occasions; and if for some reason any combinations of them are significantly different than is standard, then the decisions about participation are affected, i.e. decisions about how to participate or whether or not to participate at all.

Since the educational macro activity usually extends over twelve years, involves a tremendous quantity of books, teaching implements and materials, and classrooms and buildings, and includes a very large number of people - students and teachers (and perhaps parents, the community, and the state as well), there are a myriad of configurations that could significantly affect decision-making within or about the activity. The consequences of plurality and dynamic shift in space, time, resources and facts about participants must surely be of greater moment in education than in, say chess. Whereas in the latter, a chess board and playing space of any managable size would do, in education much depends upon having books, teachers and facilities of a very particular sort - those compatible with, and useful to, the aims of purposes of the school. More about the importance of material context in decision-making will be said later.

Chapter V

ACTIVITIES AND CONTEXTS (3): COMPETENT DECISION-MAKING AND SCHOOLING

1. Introduction

What is important in the analysis of activities and contexts are the internal relationships between the structural components of activities - programme and procedures - and the external relationship between activities and contexts. Activities must be internally consistent - i.e. consistent within the categories of programme and procedure and consistent between the two. And elements of conceptual and material contexts must be internally consistent in each category and, more importantly, compatible with the activity. In consequence, whatever decisions are made about activities must ensure that consistency is maintained and that suggested changes will be compatible with the context. The fact that activities and contexts are changeable and varied makes an intimate knowledge of both, vital.

To ensure consistency and compatibility, in what areas of knowledge should the decision-maker be competent? In this chapter we will consider the sort of issues that the curriculum decision-maker must contend with (objects-of-decision) - that is the sort of decisions to be made about schooling activities and within activities; and these will be linked with the areas of knowledge - areas of knowledge on which the competent decision-maker will have to draw.

2. Decisions About Macro Activities

On the account given, a macro activity is an activity that provides a programme for a number of micro activities. This is certainly true of education when conceived of as a period of schooling, usually about twelve years in duration to which children in Western countries are subjected. It should be noted, as well, that if macro activities are conceived in this way, it could be possible to see macro activities within the macro activity of schooling. For instance, one might suggest that in a large secondary school which is divided into academic departments, the 'programme of study' that an individual department works out - a coherent progression of courses and their prerequisites designed to provide students with a balanced understanding of the discipline - will, when put into practice engender a macro activity which is composed of various teaching and learning activities in that discipline. It would

seem to me, however, that this activity would be very much subordinate to the larger programme - at least in a secondary school. For, unlike the situation in a (European) university in which that department's programme may be the bulk if not the whole 'schooling' programme for the student (i.e. his entire university programme is determined by the department in whose discipline he is specializing), in a secondary school the prime concern is generally with the overall education of the student, only part of which is constituted by the activities in a particular discipline. So, in speaking of the macro activity of education (i.e. schooling) I will stipulatively refer to the programme of the school. Subordinate programmes such as that just mentioned will be micro activities unless otherwise stated.

What are macro activity decisions about? And what would have to be known by a competent decision-maker?

To answer the first question, they are concerned with determination or assessment of the activity structure - i.e. the programme and procedures. Procedures are the rules and so forth that are followed in carrying out the programme. At the macro level these rules direct participants to engage in this micro activity and that. Consequently, a large part of deciding about procedures is deciding which micro activities will constitute the macro activity.

Programme decisions are about the sort of school that is preferable.[1] A military academy? Seminary? Grammar school? Comprehensive? Free school? Community school?, etc. What is the purpose of such a school? What should be its aims? And so on. Should the school endeavour to make students critical? Creative? Scholarly? Intellectually and culturally sophisticated - readers of the Times rather than Daily Mirror and patrons of the theatre and ballet rather than solely the cinema or the pub? Should it endeavour to foster liberal attitudes in the search for truth in politics, religion and social relations? Or, is it to seek foster in students the spirit of a particular intellectual or religious tradition, school of thought or paradigm?[2]

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[1]Types of schools often have different versions, and within any type or version there is the possibility of individual schools being quite unique. Whether or not we think of each and every school, given that it will have some degree of uniqueness, an independent macro activity about which to decide, rather than simply an instance of a type of macro activity would depend upon the degree of uniqueness. An institution which is called a comprehensive but whose aims, etc. are vastly different than the norm would best be treated as a type unto itself.

[2]The enormous range of intellectual, religious and political traditions, which have a profound influence on the aims, etc. of types of

Procedure decision, or decisions about which micro activities will combine to form the macro activity would be the like of the following. What areas are to be taught (e.g. humanities, social sciences, sciences, vocational subjects, etc.)? Are students to study within each? Are they to concentrate on one, and if so, on which disciplines within the area? Within each discipline how are the courses to be arranged - is there to be a special order where some are prerequisites for others? There are, of course, many more questions, but these are among the most central.

So, what knowledge is essential to competent decision-making in these spheres? The question is important because its' answer might suggest <u>who</u> is best fitted to make decisions.

First is the problem of determining the activity's programme. What type of schooling is it to be? This problem has two parts: (a) what alternatives are there? and (b) which is most desirable?

Part (a) is complex because one not only has the option of choosing among different types of presently or previously existing schools, but a programme might comprise parts of different types or be newly conceived. But however concocted, the programme must be seen as a genuine instance of education. In other words, legitimate alternatives must be sorted out from (sometimes bizarre) options. Presumably the only guide we have to this is some combination of the vague external concept of education we possess and the standards and preferences of those to be served by the school (students, parents, teachers and community). As for the number of alternatives, they are logically indefinite. At this stage of decision-making, therefore, he who knows the greatest number of alternatives (other things being equal) is best fitted to decide.

(b) is a vastly more difficult question. For to see one alternative as preferable, i.e. as an optimally rational choice, one would

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schools or schools in certain locations (e.g. on Indian reservations, within tightly knit religious communities such as the Hutterites, and Eastern European and other communist countries) is a factor which accounts for the disparateness of types of education that many philosophers fail to recognize. There is a tendency among many in the Anglo-American tradition to suppose that notions of education generated from quite different traditions are somehow reconcilable - perhaps by appeal to common use of language or commitment to similar basic principles. This I believe to be a fundamental mistake. Those who steadfastly believe that, for example, a particular religious or political interpretation of the world is essential to education are at odds with, say, those in the liberal democratic intellectual tradition (for lack of a better phrase) on a matter of <u>faith</u> in basic (and conflicting) principles. On what grounds would one ever show one's tradition to be superior, except by appeal to the very underlying principles that are at issue?

require a sophisticated knowledge of principles in light of which to make the choice and one would think as well that it would be necessary to have a far more penetrating knowledge of the alternatives, namely the activity structure (or the possible structures if one is also trying to decide what the composition of the macro activity will be), i.e. the programme, with special concern for the connections between the description, internal aims and concept of education components in the form of schooling being considered. For example, one does not always simply choose between a comprehensive and a grammar school, or between either of these and a free school. One sometimes chooses, as well, among versions of each, and among individual, and in many respects, unique examples of each version. Earlier I laid great stress not only on the subtlety, richness and sophistication of possible understandings of an activity description but, equally, on the subtlety of informal rules - the intimations, understandings, and so forth - which are part of the activity structure. Much of this underlying detail varies appreciably among different instances of the same activity and hence can be significant to decision-making.

Why be so concerned with contextual details about the alternatives? The answer is that a competent decision-maker will be concerned not only with the <u>theoretical description</u> of his choice but also the <u>pragmatic outcomes</u>. As argued previously, attention to the latter is essential to full consideration of an alternative.

<u>Justifying principles</u> are of equal concern. We do not have a sufficiently distinct and powerful external criterion for what counts as educational so we must fall back on preferential principles. In other words, those serviced by the school (i.e. the parents and community) surely have certain wants and needs with regard to the type of school their children will attend. And this, measured against the interests of the children and society as a whole, is that which would normally figure prominently in the justification of one form of schooling rather than another. It is not our present concern to argue in favour of one or the other of these as the ideal principle of justification, but only to suggest the range of principles which might reasonably be considered.

If these are the considerations involved in determining what programme the macro activity is to have, what then can we say about the prerequisite knowledge of a competent decision-maker?

The considerations, restated, would number among them, these.

1. What sort of school is to be chosen bearing in mind the scope of the choice - i.e. the choice is being made for (a) individual students, or small groups, e.g. one's own child or children of a

religious or economic community, gifted children or deprived children?

2. What detailed description is to be given, bearing in mind that types of schools admit of many versions, and these in turn can be styled to fit local needs or preferences?

3. What internal aims, objectives and purposes are schooling, or the school (depending upon what answer is given to the matter of scope in 1.), to have?

In the jargon of our decision-making analysis, these would be the objects-of-decision. The question is now, what knowledge would be required to formulate and assess the theoretical and pragmatic outcomes of alternatives and for justifying principles?

Starting with theoretical descriptions: these will draw mostly on certain areas of theoretical knowledge and have to be compatible with the conceptual context, something which is important because others, participants for the most part, will need to understand the programme in all of its subtlety. (Remember as well that the conceptual context can be pluralistic, i.e. vary between locations in the same school system or shift in any one location.) The spheres of knowledge are:

1. Knowledge of types of schools
   (a) existing within the population for which the decision is being made
   (b) previously having existed within this scope
   (c) existing elsewhere
   (d) that are possible - new conceptions,
2. Understanding of theoretical frameworks of each, e.g. aims, purposes, etc. of comprehensives, freeschools, community schools, grammar schools, military academies, seminaries, etc.

Relevant to both 1. and 2. would be in-depth knowledge from philosophy, history and comparative education.

Consideration of pragmatic outcomes is characterized by the question 'What is likely to happen if this theoretically possible alternative or that one is chosen?'. Not too suprisingly it is both the conceptual and material contexts, i.e. circumstances surrounding specific instances of the activity, that generate knowledge queries. But in which disciplines?

1. Personal knowledge of the individuals involved: students, teachers, and to some extent, parents, in order to judge their reactions to the school programme that has been selected. The following are important:
   (a) conceptual background of atudents

(e.g. level of cognitive development and social values)

(b) capabilities of the learners and teachers

(c) psychological impact on individuals

2. Knowledge of social and economic dynamics, especially

(a) economic consequences, e.g. effect on the economy of schools which emphasise vocational subjects rather than the pure disciplines, as for example in a grammar school.

(b) social consequences, particularly with regard to their influence on the 'good society'.

Psychology, sociology, and economics would be germane.

And <u>justifying principles</u>, which enable the decision-maker to select among alternatives, would be developed by his theoretical knowledge of:

1. social psychology
2. social interaction theory
3. economics
4. ethical principles such as equality, concern for individualism, etc.
5. understanding of social needs and preferences

Psychology, sociology, economics and philosophy would be the relevant fields.

Looking back, it is important that we note two things. First, some of the knowledge required for choosing alternatives is simply an understanding of what a school is, and being aware of some of the obvious alternatives, e.g. grammar schools, comprehensives, free schools and community schools. But much else besides is esoteric. This is true, for instance, of understanding school systems in other countries (the point of doing which is to consider them as viable alternatives) because they are usually very much a part of those cultures which, as well, must be understood if the school system is to be evaluated properly. And, to understand clearly the programmes of any school system or school, given all that has been said about the subtlety of descriptions, takes considerable knowledge and perceptiveness. Surely this has implications for the choice of a competent decision-maker, since the knowledge prerequisites are not entirely pedestrian.

Second, even a decision about so abstract a matter as the programme of a school or school system is heavily dependent upon an understanding of local contingencies, i.e. the conceptual and material contexts. A school system which is quite satisfactory in France may be unacceptable

in Britain given different intellectual traditions - i.e. because the conceptual context is incompatible. And school systems in different parts of Canada or the United States may be vastly different because of significant differences in the school clientele and the disparate locations such that the material contexts would not be compatible with other school systems. This discrepant situation is often found between private schools for children of the rich and professional classes, inner-city schools and rural schools.

Part two of the macro activity decision which was mentioned earlier, deals with the micro activities that are to be collected together to form the macro activity. These, of course, must be compatible with the programme. Generally speaking, these are decisions about curriculum arrangements and deal with what and when children should be taught. Included would be the following:

(a) What children should be taught.

1. What subjects are worth teaching?
2. Which are most important bearing in mind
   (a) what children find interesting
   (b) what their practical needs are
   (c) the limitations of space, time, material resources, and teaching staff.
   (d) the capability of students as learners and teachers as conveyors of knowledge and learning skills?
3. What balance should exist among the various subject areas and disciplines, e.g. humanities, sciences, technology, vocational subjects?
4. What depth and breadth should be aimed at?

(b) When should children be taught?

1. What age is appropriate for introducing children to specific subjects?
2. How quickly should they be allowed to advance bearing in mind
   (a) uneven intellectual development among children, and within the same child.
   (b) social and psychological problems of rapid advancement in relation both to his peers and to parental expectations?
3. Should certain courses be considered prerequisites for others?

From which areas should the decision-maker's knowledge come?

Theoretical descriptions first.

1. Knowledge of subject alternatives, i.e. subjects which could possibly be taught. (what, when)
2. Knowledge of subject content so as to be in a position to assess individual worth, e.g. bingo vs. history.(what, when)
3. Knowledge of methods, techniques, and materials.(what)
4. Knowledge of children's learning development, social development, and motivation. (what, when)

Essential would be knowledge of the principles of and content within the various disciplines, curriculum theory and cognitive and motivational psychology.

Pragmatic outcomes, i.e. consequences of an hypothesised choice, would draw on:

1. Personal knowledge of the individuals involved: students, teachers, and to some extent parents, in order to judge their reaction to the subjects being taught, and the methods being employed, especially
   (a) the capabilities of individual learners and teachers (what, where)
   (b) psychological effects on these individuals (what, when)
   (c) economic consequences for students as future wage earners (what).
2. Understanding of collective behaviours. That is,
   (a) social impact (what, when)
   (b) economic consequences for society (what)

Psychology, sociology and economics would be the relevant fields.

And justifying principles:

1. Cognitive psychology (what, when)
2. Social psychology (what, when)
3. Social interaction theory (what, when)
4. Economic (what)
5. Subject knowledge (what, when)
6. Knowledge of methods (what, when)
7. Ethical principles about equality, concern for desires of others (what)

Psychology, sociology, economics, subject knowledge, curriculum theory and philosophy would be important.

The same two notes as were placed at the end of the discussion of knowledge requirements for programme decisions could be made here; though with one slight adjustment. First, it cannot be stressed too much that

knowledge of local contexts, both conceptual and material, are essential to competent decisions about the arrangement of curriculum subjects (and related alternatives). For deciding what to teach, insofar as the choice would be justified by a concern for the preferences of those affected, could only be accomplished if the decision-maker were a party to the preferences and overall value structure of those for whom the decision was being made (i.e. conceptual context). And, to the extent that decisions are about such things as the balance of humanities, sciences, and vocational subjects, the disciplines that will comprise each of these categories, and the depth and breadth of study within each discipline, the decision-maker must have consideration for pragmatic outcomes such as the social and economic consequences for society of the various alternatives, and the consequences for individual students (e.g. future plans, vis a vis, university entrance or careers); and the material context should be given careful consideration since these pragmatic outcomes are so heavily influenced by details of context.

Second, the theoretical knowledge required is equally as esoteric as that needed for judgments about the programme, but it differs slightly in one important respect - something which has implications for a proposed decision-maker. It is that decisions about curriculum arrangements seem to be rather less far reaching in terms of importance to the individual learner's development of point-of-view (e.g. conception of the good life, value structure, etc.), not because the consequences of them are not significant but because they are generally more technical decisions - ways and means of implementing the programme already decided upon or assumed correct. In other words, concerns about the arrangements of curriculum logically presuppose a programme, and are purposive decisions of implementation. Therefore, the ethical dimension to do with the appropriateness of one type of schooling rather than another gives way to the specialized understandings of the disciplines and curriculum construction.

3. Decisions About Micro Activities

It is a macro level decision to ask whether the study of history should be required as part of schooling. But it is a micro level decision to specify the particulars of such a study. The connection between macro and micro here is that consistency must be maintained. So, decisions about micro activities presuppose a prior understanding of the macro activity - or its programme at any rate.

Among the most important micro decisions would be decisions about course content (syllabus details), methods, strategies and techniques. The objects-of-decision in these spheres - i.e. questions about what and how to teach (syllabus details and methods), do not range quite so widely and hence need not be set out in so much detail as were the issues concerning macro activities. A more expeditious treatment would be to make a few comments about them and the relevant knowledge required for decision-making.

First, syllabus details and methods are closely linked because the latter are very often determined by the former. (Sometimes it is the other way around.) That is, decisions made about the former place certain restrictions on the latter. Mathematics, for instance, is not as (practically) compatible with discovery learning (Meno notwithstanding) as would be certain aspects of biology or physics. Equally, if one wanted to promote self-reliance in students, and discovery learning was thought to be favourable to this, it might be decided that physics or biology should be learned rather than math. The implication for our selection of a decision-maker would be that a knowledge of both is important for decisions about either one.

Second, theoretical outcomes and justifying principles would be derived from (a) an in-depth knowledge of the discipline in which the decision is being made (b) an understanding of and ability to execute a wide range of teaching methods, strategies, etc. (c) a knowledge of theories of learning and motivation (d) knowledge of the particular individuals being taught (conceptual and material context). (It goes without saying that ethical matters are to be considered - but ethical problems are not particularly outstanding here.) Pragmatic outcomes would be determined largely in virtue of one's understanding of material context - the individual learners, capabilities of the teacher, resources for learning and the time available. The importance of these contingencies (of contextual plurality and dynamic shift) cannot be stressed too much. And particular note should be made of the last mentioned of these - time. For, many educators would claim that syllabus decisions should be justified (solely) by reference to what is worthwhile learning or to what an 'educated person' should know. But this completely overlooks the fact that the macro activity of schooling has time limitations placed on it by the competence of learners and the duration of school days, years and number of grades.

Third, in deciding how to teach more is needed than an understanding of what is to be taught and knowledge of general teaching methods, strategies, etc. For, as was discussed earlier, activities of particular

sorts and locations come to have a certain character which is a function of the traditions within and surrounding the activity, the conceptual context and the personalities of participants. Schooling, because sustained personal relations are so central to it, is prone to having a 'character' which plays a large part in determining how to act in a way that, say, a single game of chess is not. In consequence, the fabric of a school or type of school generates informal rules which govern teaching method and strategy.

One commonplace example, I think, has to do with the way a teacher might present himself and his lessons to a class. If, for example, a school were academically and socially very formal; that is, if students addressed teachers as Sir or Madam and teachers called students by their last names, and if teaching traditionally took the form of lectures (where other methods might be reasonable options) and formal presentation and manner of speech was seen as proper; then if a new teacher contravened these precedents and traditions his behaviour might be seen as untoward and resented by other staff members and students. Rules, though informal rules, would have been breached. By contrast, in a free school such formalistic behaviour would probably be out of <u>its</u> character and in breach of its informal rules. A teacher could be thought odd or non conformist in such cases of breach; but as well he could be ostricised. In many respects, a breach of informal rules is as damaging as breach of formal rules. In any case, decision-making is to some extent regulated by these rules.

An interesting point emerges. We are discussing decisions <u>about</u> micro activities - i.e. decisions which determine what the micro activities will be. Since such decisions create the (micro) activity one would think that all components of knowledge necessary for this would be external to the activity. But the character of an activity, or its informal rules, comes to exist within the activity and <u>after</u> it has a history. For traditions, personal relations, norms, and so on, come into being at some time after the activity has been initiated. So, if decisions about how to teach are pragmatically dependent upon the informal rules and they only come into existence after this activity is in progress, it follows that, since the <u>how</u> of teaching has to begin with the activity if not before, then it must be amended in light of the informal rules, later.

This can be dramatized by the very familiar situation of the newly qualified teacher who learns <u>how</u> to teach in, say, comprehensive schools as a student teacher in the training college, then once actually

teaching, comes to see that considerable adjustment in style and method is necessary as the internal nuances etc. become known.

The implication for decision-making, is, of course, that decisions about how to teach may not be easy to make from outside of the activity to which they are being applied. The suggestion is that competent decision-making would most likely come from those who, besides the essential knowledge mentioned earlier, have intimate knowledge of the activity - that is, know it from the inside. This is a point that will be developed in much greater detail in a later chapter.

4. Decisions Within Macro and Micro Activities

The decisions we have been discussing are those about macro and micro activities - decisions which, once made, establish an activity and its structure. Types of schools (e.g. free school, grammar schools, and comprehensives) have quite different structures at both macro and micro levels; and within each type there are versions.

It is within these structures that day to day schooling decisions are made. Individual schools of one type or another often aspire to programmes that are uniquely their own; and, of course, constantly there are decisions about what, when, and how to teach: grammar schools, free schools, and so on, each having notions of their own. Though, whatever is decided in the individual cases, it must be consistent with the general activity structure of the type of school that it is. (Otherwise it would be a different type of school, i.e. a macro activity with its own structure.)

As regards the knowledge required of decision-makers within, as opposed to about, activities, there are some important differences. There are surely some who would say that the differences are so important as to suggest that quite different groups of decision-makers ought to make them, e.g. educational experts in the former case and teachers in the latter; though I will argue against this in due course.

The important difference in types of decision is manifest by the fact that objects-of-decision, alternatives and justifying principles within activities are largely (though perhaps not each and every case) suggested by the structure of the activity in which decision-making is taking place. In consequence, to know the activity structure would be to know most of what is necessary for internal decisions. In chess, for example, once one has grasped the programme - the game's description, aims, and so on - and understands the formal rules of play (e.g. how the pieces move) and the informal rules of strategy, psychological

manipulation of opponents, etc.; then given the usual cognitive and affective skills, internal decision-making may proceed. And in schools, to have understood that in a London comprehensive, and in an affluent area, the programme and rules are such-and-such, and that the description and purpose of one's history course is to teach central topics in Medieval European history, is thereby to put the decision-maker within a sphere of operations that makes one range of objects-of-decision, alternatives, and justifying principles seem sensible, and others not. To consider an ecclesiastic, rather than political or economic approach, or consideration of the age from the peasants' point of view, would be the sort of question (and alternatives) that would make sense in the (micro) activity of teaching history in the conditions mentioned. To consider which of the Shakespearian tragedies to teach, or whether soccer rather than rugby should be played, are objects-of-decision and options which do not rate consideration in history because they deal with different activities. One could expand this example further to show that urban comprehensives are often different (in type) than those in rural areas; and affluent communities spawn schools of yet further distinction, and so on. As the example is refined one can see that the activity structure follows suit, and hence what the internal decision-maker must know to be competent is not just the structure of a comprehensive, but of an affluent urban comprehensive.

Decisions <u>about</u> activities contrast with these, not because of anything in the structure of decision-making or in the conditions of competence; but mainly insofar as what must be known in order to formulate objects-of-decision, alternatives and justifications are not so readily available. Where internal decisions in schooling require knowledge of the programme and rules of the particular type of school that it is, external decisions (about schooling) require more esoteric knowledge of the alternatives and principles that justify the programme and, or, rules. As we have seen, this can involve, depending upon the specific decision of course, knowledge of the history and philosophy of education and comparative education; and of educational sociology, psychology and economics; and of curriculum methodology and understanding of disciplines. In other words, decisions about activities have a dimension which is usually more <u>abstract</u> than is true of decisions within.

Since the type of knowledge, at least in part, differs quite markedly as between the abstract and concrete, one might suppose that the implication for decision-makers is, perhaps, that more than one group of individuals ought to divide up the decision-making pie. For instance, one might suppose that decisions <u>about</u> schooling activities might be

handled by university based experts (e.g. philosophers and psychologists); or that macro activity decisions should be dealt with by the philosophers, historians and comparative education people, and that micro activity decisions should be the domain of the methods experts, or even groups like the Schools Council. Alternatively, macro decisions could be divided into those about the description of schooling and those about course arrangements and each allotted to different groups. And, conceivably, decisions within micro activities might be given to teachers, students or their parents. These kinds of questions will be dealt with piecemeal over the next few chapters which will consider each of the main potential decision-makers (i.e. students, parents, experts and the teaching profession) in terms of competence to make the various levels of decision.

Something which will play an important part in these considerations is the dimension of decision-making knowledge, a consideration of which we have strayed from, namely context. For in our discussion of decisions within activities we have attended mainly to knowledge required to assess theoretical descriptions of one alternative or another. We should now mention pragmatic outcomes; and of course with this comes contextual matters.

We need only reiterate a point made earlier, which is that picking out alternatives from options and then evaluating them is, or ought to be, done by considering not only the standard, or usual consequences, but by thinking as well about the likely occurrences in this particular case. (This is what we mean by considering pragmatic outcomes in full.) What affects the latter? Local contingencies: the conceptual and material context in which the activity occurs. That is, decisions about what, when and how to teach should take into account (if they are to be competent) (a) conceptual context - the concepts and level of conceptual development of the students which are relevant to the activity in question (i.e. the level of the child's understanding of the activity's structure, and the concepts which are prerequisites), (b) material context - the time available to do what is 'theoretically' justifiable, the space, relevant teaching and other resources, and psychological, sociological and economic facts about the children (e.g. the number of school periods, days and weeks to undertake the activity, the classroom space (or whatever else is necessary), the textbooks, etc., and the attitude of the children to what is to be done - their receptiveness to the idea and motivation to participate, the social effects on others (the student body, parent student relations and the community) and the economic feasibility). One might consider all of these factors of conceptual

and material context in connection with a decision of whether or not to teach a Marxist interpretation of a particular sequence of historical events or visit an historical castle, as opposed to a museum, when studying fifteenth century home furnishings. In the later case one could ask: Is there time enough to spend a whole day on a field trip - will consideration of other important historical topics have to be left out as a consequence? Is there a museum or castle within traveling distance? Are there a sufficient number of teachers (or other adults) available to supervise adequately the children? How will the parents react - do they feel that school visitations are a waste of time? Will the students have to make a financial contribution to travel or food expenses? Can they or their parents afford it? Will the children enjoy the field trip? Will they take it seriously? In addition to these questions relevant to material context one could ask about conceptual context. Are the children capable of understanding what they will be seeing and 'studying'? Will they be able to relate the field trip experience in whole and part to their current study topic? Will they be sophisticated enough, conceptually, to find the actual artifacts of greater significance than copies, drawings or explanations? To be sure, these sorts of questions about context, material and conceptual, can be raised in connection with any decision within an activity (especially schooling); and since they are important to assessment of pragmatic outcomes they are important to competent decision-making.

It is, I think, important to note from this discussion that decisions both about and within activities have in common the requirement of contextual knowledge. Furthermore, this knowledge is not only a necessary condition of competent decision-making; as well it occupies a position of considerable significance relative to the knowledge pertinent to theoretical descriptions. I have tried to stress this through example to this point, and will have a great deal more to say about it as we proceed. For if one wanted to argue that, say, pragmatic outcomes were not nearly so important in decision-making as theoretical descriptions, especially with regard to macro activity decisions, then the case in favour of having those with appropriate theoretical knowledge make decisions would be all the stronger. I, however, will want to argue quite the opposite.

5. Conclusion

I want to end by re-emphasising the thrust of the activity chapters and by explaining some of the advantages of seeing education as an activity.

The main points have been these. Education, interpreted as schooling, is an open macro activity. It has a programme and procedures just as does any activity (e.g. a sport or board game); and it is similar to golf, tennis and chess in having numerous other (micro) activities internal and subordinate to it. But, like hunting or fishing, 'schooling' is loosely described and can be structured in a myriad of different ways. So from the notion of schooling (as with hunting and fishing) there can be many different (yet in some important respects similar) macro activities. It was further contended that activities take place within both a conceptual and a material context: the former being the aggregate of conceptual schemes (or the portions relevant to school decision-making) of all participants and interested parties, and the latter being the aggregate of social, psychological and economic circumstances of participants and interested parties.

Our ultimate objective is to determine who is most competent to make curriculum decisions and this furthered to some extent in seeing what it is that has to be known in order to make such decisions. The purpose of analysing education in terms of activities and contexts is that simply by noticing the characteristic structure of an activity and the circumstances (both conceptual and material) in which it exists we can tell a little bit about what must be known and, hopefully, who might know it. That is, since activities have programmes and procedures, both would have to be known by a decision-maker who is making decisions internal to the activity. For example, one cannot make very many important decisions in chess without knowing what the game is about (its programme) and its rules (procedures).

Putting it this way gives rise to the earlier made distinction between decisions <u>within</u> an activity and those <u>about</u> an activity. The example just cited deals with the former and such decisions are, for the teacher at any rate, the most common. 'What to teach, when and how?' are matters largely prescribed by the type of school, its programme and internal rules. To put it another way, a teacher's ultimate choice among alternatives is justified by appeal to formal or informal rules (or elements of procedure) or appeal to more abstract principles, aims, purposes, etc. within the programme.

But there is another sphere of decision-making, as just indicated: it deals with decisions <u>about</u> the activity. What will be the programme? And what will be the procedures? Interestingly enough, it is in virtue of education being an open activity that such questions arise. For in closed activities such as chess very little of the structure is susceptible to change, hence, decision-making. (Some of the informal rules, e.g.

strategies, would be an exception to this.)

If one were asked to make a decision about an activity, that is, to change the structure of the activity in some way (e.g. by changing a rule or a guiding principle), what would one have to know? Three things. First, the existing structure would have to be known. For if a change is to be made to a rule or principle, whatever the change is, it must be consistent with those parts of the structure that remain unchanged. One could hardly tell if a newly proposed rule would be consistent with other rules, etc. without knowing those other rules. Second, the conceptual and material context must be known. A proposed alteration to the aims of schooling or an addition to the activities of schooling will depend for successful implementation upon how it is understood by participants (and interested parties) and the material conditions that will make it a practical possibility. That is, the contexts must be compatible with the structure of the activity. Third, certain fields of knowledge form the backdrop for curriculum matters and a familiarity with these is a requisite for the decision-maker. Even though the looseness of 'education' permits a variety of different forms of schooling, the concept is not so vague that no restrictions prevail. Since, activities have some limitation of range, particular areas of knowledge can be identified as more or less central. Without rehearsing previous arguments in detail, it can be said that decisions about activities - i.e. creating, ratifying or whatever - are more abstract than decisions within an existing activity, since in the latter case many of one's alternatives and justifications stem from past practice and established rules. On the other hand, determining the aims and principles of a type of schooling or the content to be taught often entails quite erudite knowledge in the areas of history or philosophy of education and comparative education, on the former, and considerable understanding of the disciplines, on the latter.

Decisions about the structure of an activity and those made within the structure do, however, have one very important epistemic item in common. It is the crucial relation between the sizing up of an alternative and the contexts. For it was claimed that a full statement of an alternative entails (a) the description of the alternative itself (b) consideration of usual consequences if that alternative is chosen (c) prediction of consequences in the particular use at hand. Consideration of (b) and most especially (c) requires sensitivity to both conceptual and material contexts. This applies in equal measure to decisions about as well as within activities. For it would be absurd to devise aims of schooling which, given the circumstances in which the school had to

operate, had little chance of succeeding. And, quite obviously, the same applies to decisions about content and methods.

In light of these observations about sphere of knowledge and decision-making, the question arises about whom is thus suggested as the most competent curriculum decision-maker. Seemingly the answer is clear. In the predominantly theoretical areas of decision-making <u>about</u> activities, the educational theorist should have control. And <u>within</u>, the reins should be held by the practitioner. But, certainly in the first case, we slip all too quickly by any specification of the degree of theoretical knowledge that is important; and, more importantly, we ignore consideration of pragmatic outcomes and contextual information which is needed to predict them. Because of this a more piecemeal approach to various potential decision-makers, with these considerations in mind, is called for. So the matter will be left to ensuing chapters.

Why construe education as an activity? One reason is that it quite simply <u>is</u> an activity. It is that institutionalized ritual in which children are put for twelve or thirteen years. Those, like Peters, who think of it as an external criterion are, to my mind, in error. There may be an external conceptualization possible, but it is so vague that no criterion can be generated. Granted, a criterion is necessary for making judgments about 'being educated' and what counts as 'educational'. But this criterion, I submit, is internal to particular types of education (or schooling). The criterion is part of the programme. For example, part of the activity of giving a military education is that students should become soldiers. This aim would not be external to a military education; it is a part of it. A second reason: by showing that education is an activity its' structural unity is highlighted. Programme and procedures are shown to be <u>consistent</u> within themselves and consistent with one another. A change to any structural component requires, therefore, attention to the other components. Because elements of structure can be very subtle, an intimate knowledge of the activity is necessary to decision-making about any aspect of structure. This has profound implications for our choice of decision-maker.

Certain benefits derive from the particular account of activity given. First, as mentioned above, the broad conceptualization of 'programme', rather than the more familiar 'point' or 'overall purpose', enables consideration of aims and principles that justify the full range of educational (micro) activities to be regarded as internal to types of schooling. This overcomes a relativistic difficulty that often confounds discussions about the justification of this activity or that in schools. In other words, in an attempt to formulate a detailed criterion for what

counts as educational that is external to all schooling activities including types of schooling, so much disagreement arises about what should figure among the criteria that one is inclined to feel that such disputed items seem arbitrary. But, by considering types of schooling as we have done, these fugitive items can be housed alongside other principles with which they seem more congenial. Take for example, the aim that 'students should come to think like soldiers'. It would surely be rejected from the external criterion of 'education'; but it seems quite consistent with other aims, etc. in the form of schooling we call 'military schooling'. Second, this account links context with activity in such a way as to demonstrate that without compatibility between the two, either (a) the activity itself is inconceivable, or (b) it is, from the practical point of view, an impossibility. Could one even conceive of soccer as a game without reference to a field (or any grounds) on which to play? Could soccer actually be played on grounds that did not meet certain practical requirements - say if the field was only five feet long or made of quicksand? Third, by dividing decisions into those <u>about</u> structure and those <u>within</u> structure it is more clearly seen that different types of decisions are to be made - 'rule making' and 'rule following'. This of course, emphasises the different sorts of knowledge required in each, and it thereby has implications for our choice of decision-maker. Fourth, by scrupulously avoiding, in our rendering of activity structure, talk of elements which 'constitute' the activity, and instead speaking of 'characterization', we were able to give a rather broader account of what actually governs action within activities than would have been the case were we limited to 'formal rules'. In many activities much of the action is governed by informal controls - etiquette, nuance, intimations, common strategies and so forth. The complexion of many activities, e.g. tennis or golf, derives a great deal from these. For example, in golf one simply does not talk when an opponent is hitting the ball. This is not a formal rule; it is informal. Nevertheless, if one does not scrupulously observe it, finding opponents for future games may become very difficult! Informal rules, thus, seem important to a characterization of the game. By including them as a structural element we lay them open to the decision-maker either for change or as elements with which other changes must be consistent and the context compatible. Fifth, and finally, by including an explanation of levels of understanding - of more and less sophistication - we have seen that even between genuine participants in an activity there can be a difference of understanding. Clearly, this potential for levels of understanding, will have, as well, implications for our choice of decision-maker.

In coming chapters, we will employ this analysis in an attempt to determine who is most competent to control curriculum; or who is competent to control which parts.

Chapter VI

STUDENTS AND SELF CHOICE IN CURRICULUM

1. Introduction

In preceeding chapters we determined the conditions that would have to be fulfilled by someone claiming to be a competent curriculum decision-maker. And, we analysed the structure of the activity of schooling thereby enabling us to see the domains of knowledge in which understanding is necessary for purposes of curriculum decision-making. We may now proceed to the main substantive business of this thesis which is to determine who among the reasonable alternatives (i.e. students, parents, experts or teachers) ought to have control of curriculum on grounds of competence.

My intention will be to examine each of the prospective decision-makers as though each were claiming exclusive control. The 'control'; here, will be taken in the cases of students and parents to some extent as control by a student over his own curriculum or control by a parent (or parent couple) of his (their) own child's curriculum. In the case of experts and teachers, control will refer to either control within a particular school, district, province or nation, as specified. In addition, consideration will be given to various sorts of participatory arrangements involving some or all of the aforementioned. The position I will defend is that teachers are most likely to best fulfill the conditions of competence. Now precisely which decisions they should make, and what 'teaching profession' means, (e.g. individual teachers making their own decisions, teachers in a given school, community or country making collective decisions) and who is to be counted as a teacher (e.g. practicing teachers, those with teacher training, sometime teachers who are now employed by teachers' colleges, government or private research institutions, all, some or only one of these), are matters of obvious importance which we will ignore for the moment but have on our agenda for later.

The case is to be made over five chapters: individual chapters will consider students, parents, institutional experts, various forms of participatory decision-making and teachers. In the present chapter cases for and against the competence of students will be examined. Two notes before starting. First, the proposition to be considered is, once again, that students are more competent than others to determine their own curricula - that is, each student ought to determine his or her own

curriculum. This of course does not preclude voluntary consultation with others; it simply puts the final say in the lap of the student. Second, the decisions of concern to us are limited to those we have characterized as dealing with curriculum. We have been using this term in a wide sense such that programme decisions (e.g. aims) are included as are procedural matters (e.g. teaching methods). However, this excludes such things as the appointment of staff and purchases of plant and equipment.

2. What Decisions should Students be Entitled to Make?

(a) 'Freedom' and Curriculum Decision

Not only are we interested in what students are capable of deciding, but what they ought to be 'free' to decide. If we make this rough translation of terms and use Joel Feinberg's analysis[1] of the latter, we are provided with a useful piece of conceptual apparatus.

To be free, on the 'free to free from' model, is to be free to make curriculum decisions, and free from any contraints. Moreover, the freedom we are speaking of is such that if X is free to a and from b, then X is in fact not constrained by b; not simply that X feels happy or is unconstrained by b, which may in fact constrain him. The reason for ruling out feelings is not only that it stands against ordinary usage of the term freedom, but that for us to hand curriculum control to those who simply feel free regardless of the actual constraints would be foolish. A further note about freedom and constraint is that, as in ordinary usage, only possible freedoms and removable constraints will be considered. So if a child wants to eat his curriculum or turn into a butterfly we will not bother trying to think which constraints need removing!

Pace Feinberg, constraints can be positive or negative and internal or external. Expulsion from school would be a positive and external constraint to attendance, as compared with not having enough money to pay fees to a private school which should be a negative external constraint. The key to the positive-negative dichotomy is that in cases of the latter one lacks something which would enable freedom rather than being as in the former. The external-internal distinction is somewhat arbitrarily set as outside one's mind and body as opposed to inside.

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[1] Social Philosophy (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973) Chapter 3.

Expulsion and not having fees were positive and negative respectively, but both external to one's physical body or mind. To be constrained from attending school because of the measles would be positive and internal because, on the first account, it is not an absence, and on the second it is to do with one's body. To have a low I.Q., on the other hand, would be an absence of intelligence, hence negative, and to do with the mind, hence internal.

Now among child-centred educators, those who profess to place the needs and interests of the individual child before concerns about the organization of knowledge, freedom of curriculum choice is a fundamental, if not all embracing, principle. What distinguishes them are subtle shades of disagreement about precisely what the child is to be free to do, and from what. Before looking at some of these positions it seems opportune to point out that a very common justification for freedom to decide is that it promotes the eradication of certain negative internal constraints (e.g. absence of decision-making ability). Paradoxically such educators fail to see that their justification highlights the weakness of their position, namely that a necessary condition for freedom of choice is actual negative internal constraint - so we shall see.

In this next section I want to give some credence to the notion that students ought to have control of their own curricula, or some portion of it, by considering some of the positions taken by liberal traditionalists and, more especially, by child-centred educators past and present. Along with a description of areas of curriculum in which they felt children should be self-determinate will be noted the justifications offered. Then, in a following section, a critique of the justifications will show that most justifications are either inadequate or dependent upon an assumption of competence. This assumption will then be shown to be flimsy.

(b) Freedoms that Traditional and Child-Centred Educators have Allowed Children in Curriculum Decision-Making

What ought children to be free to decide and why? The most dismal conceptions of 'traditional schooling' against which the progressives fought held the student to be properly unfree as a decision-maker because naturally constrained, internally and negatively, by an absence of knowledge and cognitive development. In consequence, decisions about the macro activity and within the micro activities were all to be decided by someone other than the student. In the extreme, decisions about what

size of pencils to use, what drawings to do in art, what colours to make countries when colouring in maps, when to sharpen a pencil, etc. were all made for the student. This view is not widely accepted anymore. Even 'traditional' schools commonly ease the positive constraints by teachers to enable considerable decision-making within micro activities (e.g. choice of projects in art and social studies, selection of topics in the latter and in science, and things of this sort). Older children are frequently given the opportunity of deciding about micro activities, such as whether to take this or that math course or whether to take a literature course instead. To the conservative eyes of some traditionalists a wildly extravagant extention of such lenience is the cafeteria curriculum which enables the student to make a significant contribution toward structuring his own macro activity. But this is hardly very radical and must be kept in perspective. For the cafeteria usually has limited offerings and once an item, a course, is selected it is the teacher or school who determines content and methods within. In consequence, positive external constraints often prevent very much student freedom - in either macro or micro decisions.

To contrast with this picture, enter the early twentieth century progressives, who believed that education should be based upon the needs and felt-interests of children; and children more than anyone else were seen as being competent to discern them. Helen Parkhurst, for example, developed a programme in the United States in 1913 which became known as the Dalton Laboratory Plan (and was later brought to England as the Dalton Plan).[2] The idea was to preserve from traditional schooling the notion of cultural transmission but to accomplish this without encrusting the minds of children, fettering them for life with inert knowledge (to use Whitehead's phrase), a slavish disregard for evidence, idleness carelessness and failure. The Plan was that children should contract, month-by-month, to study certain major subjects such as history, mathematics, science, English, etc. and minor subjects such as music, art, handiwork, domestic science and so forth. The content and method of study was each student's choice, on grounds that it is not for the teacher to choose what the child must know. Says Parkhurst

> ... the curriculum of any school should vary according to the needs of the pupils, and even in schools where it is designed to serve a definite academic purpose, this aspect should not be lost sight of as it often is.[3]

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[2] Education on the Dalton Plan (London: John Bell, 1922).

[3] Ibid., p. 23.

School, she felt, could be made as attractive as play and this done through 'experience' enabled by freedom and responsibility.

> Freedom is therefore the first principle of the Dalton Laboratory Plan. From the academic, or cultural, point of view, the pupil must be made free to continue without interruptions his work upon any subject in which he is absorbed because when interested he is mentally keener, more alert, and more capable of mastering any difficulty that may arise in the course of his study. Under the new plan there are no bells to tear him away at an appointed hour and claim him pedagogically to another subject and another teacher. Thus treated, the energy of the pupil automatically runs to waste .... Unless a pupil is permitted to absorb knowledge at his own rate of speed he will never learn anything thoroughly. Freedom is taking one's own time. To take someone else's is slavery![4]

And later she says:

> 'Under the Dalton Laboratory Plan we place the work problem squarely before him, indicating the standard that has to be attained. After that he is allowed to tackle it as he thinks fit in his own way and at his own speed. Responsibility for the result will develop not only his latent intellectual powers, but also his judgment and character.'[5]

Intellectually, she claimed, freedom shapes and tempers thought and sharpens and enlarges judgment. Socially it promotes self-discipline and regard for others which is essential in life outside the school. None of this is far from the real world preparation and experience concept of education espoused by Dewey. For like Parkhurst, Dewey believed that a child's education had to begin with concern about his future and needs and with his felt interests. For only with this beginning would education as experience and growth commence - i.e. the process of learning and understanding through (worthwhile) experiences which lead to others, and they to others.[6]

Apart from some of the particulars, Parkhurst's Dalton Plan is similar in important respects to other child-centred programmes of the day, both in Britain and the U.S.A. In Winnetka, Illinois, for instance, School Superintendent Carleton Washburne was responsible for implementa-

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[4] Ibid., p. 16.

[5] Ibid., p. 18.

[6] See John Dewey Experience and Education (1938) (New York: Collier Books, 1963) especially Chapter 3.

tion in 1919 of a bipartite programme which featured individualized programmes in the three R's, sciences and social studies and, in the second part, endeavoured to promote self-expression and creativity through art and group activities.[7] This programme was thought to be very influential in the spread of streaming in the U.S. because less radical school districts throughout the American mid-West were willing to acknowledge in principle the claim of individual differences in learning but unwilling to go so far as to provide individual learning packages - hence the development of group programmes (i.e. streams).[8] Homer Lane, an American influenced by Dewey, in Britain, founded the Little Commonwealth, a school which, in practice, was more social than academic in focus, but which espoused strongly the principles of freedom and love.[9] All social and academic constraints here were self-imposed by students. In part, the justification for freedom was, as at Winnetka, pedagogic success. Added to this was the Freudian notion that freedom could be emotionally therapeutic. T. Percy Nunn, writing in 1930, adds a moral line of justification to freedom which is the claim that the development of individuality is the first duty of education and this rests upon a belief in the infinite value of the individual person and his responsibility for his own destiny.[10]

In some respects, freedom of choice is more apparent than real. Attendance was compulsory in all of the above. And, as Parkhurst, Dewey and Nunn all took pains to explain, their views of educating were compatible with the presence of teachers and classrooms and all were what might be called 'soft paternalists' insofar as the teacher was to be seen as a leader, guide or planner, one who, rather than dictating programme and procedure, would suggest to students means of attaining ends and would manipulate the environment so as to place alternatives before the student which would enhance his exposure to a greater range of educative experience than would otherwise be the case. Freedom, then, would be exercised within a material context arranged by the teacher. The conceptual context would be a given as well, since the adult world

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[7] L.A. Cremin, The Transformation of the School (New York: Random House, 1961), pp. 295-9.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Indeed, a little too much 'love' allegedly, because the school was forced to close in 1918 for rumoured (though unproven) sexual improprieties between Lane and some of the older girls. See Talks to Parents and Teachers (New York: Shocken Books, 1928).

[10] Education, Its Data and First Principles (London: Edward Arnold & Co., 1930).

represented by the teacher, parents and community would be that into which the student would be initiated. Beyond this, the extent to which actual freedom could exist would depend, in part, on the extent to which the negative and internal constraints of lack of intelligence, cognitive growth and cognitive experience inhibited competent decision-making. Further, actual freedom to make macro and micro decisions would depend upon the positive external constraints of teachers whose interpretations of 'leading, guiding and planning' varied away from and toward 'determination' of curriculum.

Since the 1960's, child-centred education, under the names free schooling, open schooling and deschooling, has equalled and in some cases outdone the radical promotion of child freedom of their progressive forebearers. Beginning with the romantic belief in the innate goodness and curiosity of the child stemming from Rousseau and Pestalozzi, which even Dewey shared, such people as A.S. Neill,[11] Ivan Illich,[12] and Paul Goodman[13] denounced even the very liberalized versions of traditional schooling. Neill, greatly influenced by Homer Lane,[14] established Summerhill School in Britain which provided children with considerable social freedom and with the right to determine not only what, when and how they would learn but whether they would learn anything at all (in contrast with most progressives, save perhaps Lane). In other words, seemingly the entire programme and procedure of the macro activity (and hence micro activities) was at their choosing. 'Seemingly' because the material context limited children to the resources of rural and residential school, and in which surely conflicts over the available resources (e.g. teachers or laboratory equipment) would necessitate the curbing of someone's freedom, and, of course, the conceptual context would be outside the domain of choice. Illich and Goodman, both saddened by the intellectually debilitating mentality of modern (largely American) schooling, argued that learning could be best promoted by allowing

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[11] Summerhill (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968).

[12] Deschooling Society (New York: Harper and Row, 1970). For an example of the political and economic aspects see S. Bowles and H. Gintus, Schooling in Capitalist America (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976), pp. 256-62.

[13] Compulsory Miseducation (New York: Vintage, 1964).

[14] See the Neill's forward to Lane's, Talks to Parents and Teachers, op. cit.

children to pursue felt-interests outside the restrictive school environment - indeed schools as such should be abolished. From the standpoint of child freedom, this proposal would maximise freedom of choice in curriculum and would do likewise with matter of context. For a child with the resources of a society would presumably have a greater range of material circumstances; and the same would be true of the conceptual context within which his decisions would be made.

There are many people in the modern day version of progressivism who do not support deschooling and who see that residential schools such as Summerhill are not possible everywhere, yet who favour a child-centred approach to schooling, as opposed to subject-centred.[15] John Holt,[16] Jonathan Kozol,[17] Herbert Kohl,[18] Charles Silberman[19] and many others could be included in this group whom we will label proponents of open schooling supporters. Barbara Blitz, generalizing about them says;

> Many of these attempts to finds new forms of educational methods share similar interpretations of ways in which some basic needs of children can best be met. Most would agree that 1. children should have the right to pursue individual interests and activities; 2. that they need to be actively engaged with their environment and other people in order for meaningful learning to occur; 3. that the environment is of major importance in structuring the learning of the child; 4. that children learn at their own pace and with their own particular learning styles; 5. that learning should be exciting and enjoyable; and 6. that the teacher's role should be that of diagnostician, guide and stimulator. With these basic building blocks, other ingredients may be quite variable, depending upon the philosophy and personality of the teacher and upon the available facilities.[20]

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[15]For subject centred approaches based on the nature of knowledge see P.H. Hirst 'Liberal Education and the Nature of Knowledge' in R.F. Dearden, P.H. Hirst & R.S. Peters eds., Education and the Development of Reason (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), and Jerome Bruner, Process of Education (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963), pp. 123-4, 210.

[16]How Children Fail (New York: Pitman, 1964), Freedom and Beyond (London: Penguin, 1973) and many others.

[17]Death at an Early Age (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1967) and Free Schools (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972).

[18]The Open Classroom (New York Review of Books, 1969).

[19]Crisis in the Classroom (New York: Random House, 1970).

[20]The Open Classroom (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1973), pp. 3-4.

The force of 'right' in point 1. is unclear, but even if it means only commitment to an ideal rather than a moral entitlement, taken with point 6. one would expect that the teacher's guidance and stimulation would be unobtrusive so as to maximize student freedom. Certainly this is the use with writers such as Holt;[21] but Blitz goes on to explain that free choice is subject to the constraints of the environment and of the teacher's influence, something which is particularly important in providing a broad range of subject matter for students. She remarks:

> ... the total organization of the class and the materials available within it gives control over how children spend their time and what they learn. Therefore, even giving great freedom to students to choose what they will learn and when, we still maintain controls inherent in the school situation. When we add the interpersonal relationship between teacher and student, even more subtle controls begin to enter the picture so that the student is never really left entirely free to pursue his own interests.[22]

Some radical educators might shy away from talk of 'control' in favour of, say, Dewian 'leadership'.[23] The two are, however, difficult to disentangle. For leadership exists in activities which have material and conceptual contexts, both of which 'control'; and activities by their very nature are rule-governed - control again. As Dewey says 'No rules, then no game; different rules then a different game'.[24] And, on the other side, if teachers influence students positively, then how does this differ from leadership?

What sorts of justifications do modern child-centred educators put forward for giving freedom of choice, if a limited freedom, to the child? One line of argument is the claim that teaching is an anathema. Harold Entwistle[25] has catalogued Carl Rogers' complaint that outcomes of teaching are either unimportant or hurtful to students;[26] F. Froebel's belief that teaching is a threat to the students;[27] and Jean Piaget's

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[21] See Freedom and Beyond, especially Chapter 3.

[22] Open Classroom, p. 60.

[23] Experience and Education, p. 59.

[24] Ibid., p. 52.

[25] Child-Centred Education (London: Methuen, 1970), pp. 142-5.

[26] On Becoming a Person (London: Constable, 1961), p. 216; cited in Entwistle.

[27] The Education of Man (London: Edward Arnold, 1887), p. 7; cited in Entwistle.

claim that direct teaching is not as effective as spontaneous concept formation by the child.[28] A second way of arguing is that there is greater heuristic value in discovery learning than traditional lecturing and that the open school more easily accommodates the former than can traditional schools. This is sustained by an array of arguments claiming that learning of greater depth and breadth can be wrought by starting from the felt-interests of the child. Alfred North Whitehead stamped as 'inert knowledge', and thereby undesirable, propositions without present relevance for children.[29] And, although Whitehead believed that ultimately teachers ought to decide curriculum content (to suit the children), others such as Dewey and even Piaget have maintained that a problem-solving encounter for the student is the only effective way for real learning to continue. Where Dewey and Piaget differ is that the latter favours 'contrived' problems and the former does not.[30]

A third line of argument, closely linked with the second, is that the very meaning of education can be tied to the pursuit of one's epistemic interests. In this vein P.S. Wilson intends that a necessary (and evidently sufficient) condition for something being educational is that it be knowledge of intrinsic value. The later is to be determined by its interest for the individual, who encounters it, a limiting proviso being that pursuing it not be harmful to others or immoral. Curriculum content, therefore, is whatever interest the child.[31]

(c) Criticisms of Proposed Justifications of Child Freedom

A preliminary point is that if a child is to have decision-making freedom, he may choose no curriculum at all. Open classroom supporters when confronted with this usually offer soothing remarks about the innate curiosity of the child and it being only a matter of time before taking up some (roughly) academic interest.[32] Whether they are right about innate curiosity is neither here nor there, but if a child were to opt

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[28] Language and Thought of the Child, p. 11; cited in Entwistle.

[29] The Aims of Education (New York: Macmillan Company, 1929), Chapter One.

[30] For this point see Entwistle, op. cit., pp. 154-5.

[31] Interest and Discipline in Education (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), pp. 66-9.

[32] See, for example, John Holt, Freedom and Beyond, Chapter Six.

for no curriculum at all for an indefinite period of time, then this is one exercise of freedom from which he should be constrainted. For in the general case, we are assuming education to be essential (regardless of whether this is justified as a Kantian duty, a prerequisite of personhood, instrumentally from the point of view of the child or society, or whatever).

A second point is that the 'freedom as therapy' justification used by Neill and others cannot of itself, be an adequate justification for freedom to make curriculum decisions because by nature it presumes mental illness in all students, and this is simply not (obviously) the case. In other words, if we assume most children are mentally healthy, they would not be in need of the therapy that would be the reason for allowing them freedom.

Third, if as Wilson argues, the sole criterion for determining curriculum content should be the felt-interest of the child; and this because being interested in something gives educative value to it; then we are commited to the view that a worthwhile activity, micro and presumably even macro since a child might be interested in a particular type of schooling (e.g. military), is something which only the child can determine. This is difficult to see. There is something intuitively plausible about the claim that educative worthwhileness exists only insofar as people find things interesting (either for its own sake or because they anticipate it being useful) - i.e. that knowledge, like gold, has value only insofar as it is recognized as having it. But to think that an individual child is to be the arbiter of such value in specific cases, rather than say, agreement in judgment by members of a society, seems mistaken. Is a child's all-consuming interest in carpentry projects to the exclusion of learning the three R's, social studies and science, that which determines the former as being educationally worthwhile and the latter not? Do the consequences for the child such as a consequent lack of cognitive perspective not have a bearing on what is deemed educationally worthwhile? Is it impossible to learn something in which one is not interested? And, cannot interests be created and kindled? Enough troublesome questions can be raised to make the thesis dubious.

Another version of the interests thesis, however, is that children will be interested in what is in fact worthwhile. This argument is not that what they want is worthwhile, but that they will want what is worthwhile.[33] From Rousseau, Pestalozzi and others, this romantic notion

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[33]For an interesting discussion of this see Robin Barrow, Common

supposes that children will, unfolding from within, do what is right if not corrupted. Neill was one of its more illustrious contemporary exponents, and Barbara Blitz contends that as a matter of fact, children will be interested in the disciplines, which we have come to think of as worthwhile. She says:

> Many critics of the open classroom do not feel that a young child can be trusted to select learning areas which will be profitable. [However] most curriculum guides have been compiled by assessing the natural interests of the children of particular ages and pairing these with the expected developmental skills and abilities for that group.[34]

(However, Blitz, and those open classroom supporters whom her views are supposed to represent, allow that teachers can and should influence a student's curriculum choices where it appears that a child might not be successful). But a very real difficulty arises here. Apart from the problem of establishing what activities are worthwhile, there is the question of how the student is to know what is worthwhile. How, for example, is the student supposed to assess the worth of Euclidian geometry without first having had considerable familiarity with the field? And if we follow Dewey and Whitehead in thinking that the value of knowledge is dependent upon the use to which it can be put, we must assume that students can recognize the uses. But this supposes that the student has a reasonable understanding of the problems that arise in his life, which supposes, in turn, that he is able to assess his life in a very sophisticated way. How is this sophistication to be acquired if not from prior initiation into the various forms of knowledge which the student has not had but is now deciding about?[35] The issue here is <u>competence</u>. How is the child competent to do what the romantics say he can? We will consider this in detail shortly. For the matter of competence underlies the other justifications. For instance, Parkhurst and others maintained that educational benefits of freedom were such things as the shaping of thought and sharpening of judgment. Freedom is therefore an aid to developing decision-making competence. But are not some decisions so important as to require developed competence to justify the freedom to make them (e.g. macro activity decisions)?

<u>Sense and the Curriculum</u> (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1976), pp. 52-63.

[34] Op. cit., p. 59.

[35] For a discussion of this sort of problem see Harold Entwistle, op. cit., pp. 148-9.

Would children be competent? Competent for what? And, the alleged right to freedom of choice is similarly dependent upon competence; rights ascriptions make no sense otherwise. Can you have a right to become a tree or turn yourself inside-out? Of course not! And it would make no more sense to suppose that someone has a right to decide about their own curriculum when they are patently incapable. Again the question, are children competent, and for what?

Finally, the supposition (by Rogers and Froebel) that teaching might be harmful seems rather dubious in light of the fact that a great many people have been taught and are, in consequence, emotionally well balanced, apparently happy and educated. Nevertheless, even if there is some truth to the suggestion, we are faced with the alternative of allowing children to make choices, and once again this raises the matter of competence. For if children are not capable of making the choices, or making them well, we are then in a position of having to choose between two evils. Prima facie, the harms of teaching would seem the lesser.

3. Are Students Competent?

To assess the competence of students as decision-makers our appeal will be to the conditions of competence worked out in a proceeding chapter, namely the abilities condition, knowledge condition and access to relevant data. It will not, however, be necessary to discuss the third of these because it depends upon, at a minimum, fulfillment of the abilities condition; the latter I will argue is not satisfied by students in the general case.

(a) The First Condition: Cognitive and Emotional Abilities

Cognitive abilities such as foresight, orginality, a sense of relevance, and so forth develop over time in some complex intertwining of biological maturation and experience (acquisition of propositional and procedural knowledge). The epistemic rather than biological component is, perhaps, most easily made clear. Abilities such as 'relevance' and 'foresight', to take examples, surely could not be solely biological developments. For to claim that A has a refined sense of relevance would surely be an observation about A consequent of A's having demonstrated this in judgments x and y with the prediction that it would be similarly manifest in z. Now, how would A demonstrate this ability in

x or y. Surely it would be his having judged that a was germane to b in, say x; this presumably would only be possible if A had considerable knowledge of x. Equally, 'foresight' in x would entail a prediction by A that c will be essential, important, useful, etc. to a and b; a judgment which, again, would necessitate considerable knowledge of x. And, a final illustration, 'orginality' is an attribute of A based on past performance in x and y. But contrary to the popular conception, it cannot be simply a casting of imagination to come up with something new. More is involved. For if c is to be taken by A as orginal in x then A must have general knowledge a and b; since it is only in virtue of his knowing a and b that he can have a criterion for determining that c is new knowledge in x - that it is compatible with a and b, consistent with the rules of x, and not identical to a or b.

To put these ideas more concretely, think of a teacher planning the social studies curriculum for ten year olds before the term begins. In a unit on the community a question arises about the inclusion of a field-trip to the fire station. How would the teacher, who is thought to have a strong 'sense of relevance', determine the relevance of such a visit to the unit? Obviously this could not be solely an appeal to some mysterious personal capacity; rather an understanding of the services of the community, and perhaps also knowledge of the students' level of preparation would be involved. 'Foresight', say in planning procedural difficulties with taking young children away from the school, would require an understanding of the usual problems to be encountered with ten year olds, etc. 'Originality', if it were to be manifest in this curriculum unit, would require of the teacher imagination (perhaps a 'mysterious' power) and, of course, a knowledge of social studies curriculum sufficient to warn of what is not original.

Now the point of discussing abilities in this way is to show that not only are they (i.e. relevance, foresight and originality) dispositions which people have, but they are linked, of logical necessity, with knowledge (though, admittedly, not wholly constituted by it). If children are to have these abilities then they must have the knowledge as well. It is not, I think, difficult to see that children will not have very refined senses of relevance etc. at an early age - i.e. before they have had much experience in the areas in which their judgments are being made. Being prerequisites to competent decision-making, the argument for child freedom in curriculum matters becomes shaky.

As mentioned, child-centred educators have not only been aware of this but have argued that these abilities must be developed. Of course, they have maintained that freedom is a precondition of their being

developed and should not therefore be regarded as properly an entitlement consequent of having acquired them.

This is persuasive, but only to a point. Granted it is difficult to imagine how, for example, 'relevance' would develop independent of experience of spheres in which one is a potential decision-maker and being acquainted with relevance relations between a s and b s in that area. But it does not follow of necessity that one must actually make decisions about or within A in order to acquire this knowledge and develop these capacities.

In fairness to open school proponents though, the claim is usually that freedom would augment development, not that it is a necessary condition for it. Suppose this is correct. What implication does it hold for curriculum decision-making? Quite plainly, micro activity decisions abound in which the consequences of being wrong are not momentous, and in which students could safely exercise their nascent intellectual capacities. There is no obvious reason why primary school children cannot decide which plants to grow, what to name the pet turtle and which community service (e.g. police department, fire station, etc.) to visit on a field trip. The bounds can be stretched considerably for older children to include occasional topics of study, novels to be read and so forth. But micro activity decisions about course offerings, methods of investigation, etc. require more refinement in cognitive abilities. Under supervision of the teacher it seems reasonable that students, particularly older ones, could be given some, even considerable, loose line; but not so much that they strangle in it. Macro activity decisions are another matter. Such decisions are about the programme and procedures of an activity. They are, therefore, decisions of principle. Now according to Kohlberg, a child, before the age of puberty, rarely conceives of the rules of an activity as potentially alterable because he does not see them as human constructs. If this is true, the pre-adolescent decision-maker would have difficulty making such decisions.[36] And the 'practice makes perfect' justification of freedom in this case would be rather scary when the consequences of mistaken choices are taken into account. Imagine, for example, a child devoting himself entirely to handicrafts.

Now, obviously individual cases differ, and later in adolescence the situation improves. But, again, according to Kolhberg, as regards

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[36] L. Kohlberg, 'Stage and Sequence: The Cognitive Developmental Approach to Socialization', in D.A. Goslen, ed., Handbook of Socialization Theory and Research (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1969), pp. 347-480.

social and moral behaviour, it is only when someone has reached the sixth stage (and final stage in his model of moral development) that he perceives and acts in accordance with principles that underlie behavioural rules. This stage is often not reached until one's early twenties if it is reached at all.[37] (Environmental stimulation and to some extent intelligence, influence this). Granted, the level of formal operations is usually reached long before this, but to the extent that the child's making of decisions about curriculum involves evaluative reflection about principles (of activities), our concern about cognitive immaturity is very real.

However, there is a problem with taking this line of argument too far. Clearly, the latter stages of Kohlberg's stage sequence development are important in consideration of excellence but not necessarily competence. It is difficult to know where to draw the line, but if we insist on too high standards, we could end up by specifying conditions of competence which a great many adults even in western democratic societies, not to mention more primitive ones, cannot meet. It seems, therefore, that the argument against adolescent competence, though forceful in particular circumstances, begins to weaken increasingly as children mature.

Still there are further considerations. When we discussed competence in an earlier chapter we claimed that past the simple fact of cognitive ability - one's capacity for principled thinking - there is the affective dimension, i.e., one's emotional maturity, which, I suppose, partly accounts for one's actually resolving to act on principle and then going ahead with it. (Perhaps this factor helps to explain why children who reach the level of formal operations in their mid teens do not exhibit a significant amount of mature (i.e. stage six) moral and social behaviour, i.e. action on principle, until their twenties).

These affective traits, or personal qualities, are such things as the inclination to make decisions and do so rationally and to be confident. Self-esteem, firmness, uninhibitedness, integrity, courage, and determination are central in these. Yet the typical teenager lacks precisely these qualities. Lack of self-esteem and inhibitedness about his developing physique, breaking peer-group norms, and much else besides, is characteristic of adolescents and hence a good reason not to remove the paternal hand entirely.

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[37] Ibid., pp. 38-9.

Over and above competence we adumbrated further characteristics which, like Aristotelian virtues or excellences, are important to enabling one to make good quality decisions; a corollary being of course that it is likewise important to curriculum decision-making. We mentioned consistency, precision, clarity, accuracy, objectivity, rigour, impartiality, and respect for facts and arguments.

These are dispositions which, like relevance, are a desired consequence of certain educational experiences. Those in which students see them exhibited by their teachers and, more to the point, are themselves encouraged to acquire them - and which are not as likely to arise in absence of such educational experiences. Yet, they are the very dispositions which are needed in decision-making. Clearly, the excellences are important to someone designing educational experiences which will promote the development of the same in others. Students just do not qualify.

(b) Could Students Fulfill the Second Condition of Competence - Knowledge?

The most serious objection, by far, to be raised against the idea of permitting students to make the important decisions is that they lack sufficient knowledge. Recall from our analysis of quality in decision-making that one must (a) sort random options into alternatives on the basis of their theoretical descriptions and pragmatic outcomes, and (b) employ the principles of depth, breadth, and centrality in proposing alternatives and justifying principles. Thinking just of theoretical outcomes for the moment, how are students supposed to be capable of deciding what aims, subject arrangements, and topic content ought to structure the macro activity of education for them when the knowledge required to make such decisions is, to a large extent, the very knowledge they are now deciding whether or not they should acquire? In other words, deciding whether or not schooling should have programme X or Y presupposes that one knows enough about X and Y (theoretically) in order to make the choice.

Micro activity decisions (e.g. subject content) face much the same sort of objections. On this issue John White[38] argues that some subjects like mathematics, the pure sciences, art appreciation, and philosophizing are only comprehensible in terms of the concepts which are intrinsic to

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[38] Towards a Compulsory Curriculum (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), Chapter 3.

the subjects themselves. Hence one needs to have studied the subject in order to understand what it is about. Since this knowledge must precede a rational decision whether or not to study the subject further, it follows that the uninitiated are in no position to choose one way or the other. By contrast, cookery, painting, organized games, speaking a foreign language and so on can be understood in terms of concepts outside themselves. So, in connection with activities in which subjects from the second category are prominent someone who is deciding how to construct or arrange rules so as to make up the activity or perhaps simply decide how to participate or whether to participate in one that is already constituted, might be able to imagine the relevant details (in desired depth, breadth, and centrality). Such a thing is logically possible for subjects in category two but not in category one.

I would not disagree with White on any of this so far but I would point out that it is not at all clear that one needs, as a matter of logical necessity, a formal schooling introduction to such things as mathematics, philosophizing, etc. in order to know enough about them to make decisions. For according to influential developmentalists like Piaget, these concepts appear to develop as part of normal cognitive development, and one can be introduced to them informally. That is, it is logically possible for a child to develop these concepts, in mathematics, for example, by means other than formal study at school as would be the case with precocious children. Hence it is possible, logically, for them to formulate theoretical alternatives which could include an option to study mathematics. So, even if we agree with White that certain subjects, like those in his category one, have concepts internal to those subjects, and that introduction to those concepts must logically precede decision-making about activities in which they are central, we can still see that such an introduction may temporally precede any formal study of them, and that, hence, decision-making about such activities by unschooled children could be possible. Nevertheless, White definitely has a strong empirical claim, because in fact, children rarely have the knowledge.

We can extend this to give a further reason why children are dubious decision-makers. Our concern is that understanding something admits of degrees. Simply having been introduced to central concepts does not ensure a <u>depth</u> of understanding. But this is vital to the quality of one's decision-making and in turn depends upon more than simply being made aware of the conceptual components of an alternative. I take it that Mary Warnock, who stresses the importance of detailed study of particular subjects to one's ability to imagine changes within them, and

who argues that development of the imagination is a central aim of education would agree that students are, as a factual matter, incapable of sufficiently in-depth understanding of theoretical alternatives prior to their education to make informed judgments about them.[39]

Deweyans, who sanction child freedom because of their faith in the heuristic benefits of problem solving - problems that spontaneously arise in the mind of the child and which he feels inclined to solve - are on equally unstable ground. For the child's opportunity to handle this micro decision is wholly dependent upon a problem actually occuring to him (assuming we are, here, concerned about spontaneous and non-contrived problem-solving as favoured by Dewey but not all open classroom supporters). But as Bantock notes:

> All through his exposition Dewey seems too much to assume that the ability to recognize the presence of problems is a matter of little or no difficulty.... What Dewey fails to make sufficiently clear is the enormous dependence of even the modern scientist on past knowledge before the presence of a problem can be recognized and a hypothesis formulated.[40]

This problem is understandably overlooked by Deweyans because in science, for example, any simple child's question about the nature of things can be seen as the first opened door in an almost infinite series of increasingly sophisticated questions, one leading to another, each probing the subject in greater depth. But in history, for example, it is not quite so easy to see what would ever get a child wondering about the possibility of alternative interpretations of events? Or in literature, would it likely occur to a child to puzzle about allegories or irony? Perhaps, but the likelihood would be so much greater if the child were initiated by someone already knowledgeable. And even if children do stumble across knowledge that would be of help to them in solving problems, it is not at all clear that they would recognize this fact. I quote Entwistle commenting on a study by Jersild.

> He concluded that children are often unable to identify the existence of problems which touch them closely. He noted that the deprived child tended not to ask for things which might mitigate his deprivation, except that the chronically hungry child showed an interest in food. Children

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[39] 'Towards a Definition of Quality in Education', in R.S. Peters ed., The Philosophy of Education (London: Oxford University Press, 1973).

[40] G.H. Bantock, Education in an Industrial Society (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), p. 33. Quoted in Entwistle, op. cit., p. 148.

> deprived in other senses (for example, the child living in a slum) were unaware of their deprivation. 'The deprived child' is an adult concept and the child himself cannot always know that it is in his best interests that the circumstances of his deprivation should be removed. And even when Jersild's children were aware of fear, they rarely expressed a wish for help or understanding in overcoming these, or showed any recognition that schooling might help them come to grips with themselves or their problems.[41]

A further and final objection leading from the knowledge condition of competence back to the abilities condition rests on a distinction made in our analysis of competent decision-making. To give a full account of any alternative course of action, before judging it against others, we said that one had to describe the alternative - give its 'theoretical description' - then consider the 'pragmatic outcomes' - i.e. the consequences of selecting the alternative in the case at hand given the contingencies of context. Now if the student is making his curriculum choices on the basis of felt-interest, is he giving due consideration to pragmatic outcomes? Unless his interest is fuelled by some practical foresight (e.g. a student's interest in biology fanned by his desire to become a doctor) the answer is no, and his decisions are not competently made. Doubts about students thinking ahead, etc. arise because the cognitive and affective abilities we discussed are often not fully developed. Hence, an aspect of the knowledge condition may not be satisfied because of an inability to satisfy an abilities condition.

(c) The Verdict on Students as Decision-Makers

Concerns about immaturity and inadequate knowledge speak against student freedom to decide about the macro activity because the consequences of error are severe. Practice may sharpen decision-making skills, but too much is at stake when choices are being made about the programme and procedures of schooling (i.e. choice of the micro activities that combine to form the macro activity). This is not the case with all micro activities. A great range of decisions are possible with respect to content and methods of learning in which students may be competent. Given the span of student ages and levels of development it is impossible to specify particular decisions to be made by students; obviously the more mature the student, the greater his range of competence.

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[41] Child-Centred Education, op. cit., p. 149; commenting on Jersild and others, Children's Interests.

Two further notes. First, open classrooms or close approximations are particularly conducive to maximization of student freedom with a modicum of risk. For if the views expressed by Blitz are favoured, as opposed to those of Holt, or the even more radical views of those such as Neill, then considerable influence and supervision of student choices is compatible with student initiative. (I say 'initiative' here because the so-called freedom is subject to veiled constraints if teachers not only manipulate the environment and influence ('guide', 'lead', etc.) but retain veto powers.) Second, we brush by an ethical area here of which note should be taken. For to claim that students ought not to decide, i.e. be <u>forbidden</u> to decide, on the basis of incompetence can be defended on paternalistic grounds. That is, we can say that it behooves parents, and after them teachers, the community, and the state, to protect children from themselves until such time as they are competent. But paternalistic argument is considerably weakened by applying it past competence to excellence. That is, we can save children from themselves if they are incompetent but not because they are not excellent. For the liberal principle of presumed individual liberty is normally denied only to those who are incompetent choosers, hence not moral agents (e.g. infants, animals and the insane). Insofar as students are predictably incompetent we can forbid them decision-making freedom as paternalists. But this changes as they mature. However, this would prejudice the type of normative claim on which our general thesis is based, namely, the general desirability of decision-making entitlement being extended to the <u>most</u> competent. Hence, if I may anticipate some conclusions of arguments to come, students will come last in the pecking order of competence, certainly behind teachers and educational experts. Now child-centred die-hards might oppose the pecking order with the claim that competence is a child's purchase voucher for freedom of choice, curriculum included. The mistake here is not seeing that school authorities and tax payers are not obliged to commit their resources - the time and energies of teachers school facilities and educational materials - to children even if the latter are, basically, free to choose.

Chapter VII

PARENTS AS CURRICULUM DECISION-MAKERS

1. Parents and the Scope of Parental Decision-Making

Prior to asking whether parents are competent curriculum decision-makers, there are some matters of clarification with which we must deal. Who are we including in the classification of 'parents'? What sort of decisions do they, typically, want to make? What are the ways in which they can be envisioned actually making these decisions if they are given title?

To start with the first question, natural parents or legal guardians are obvious candidates. But, included as well could be any adults who have had or are capable of having children. Each of these, past, present and future parents, could be said to have a rather direct interest in schooling. However, the circle could reasonably be broadened. It is not just parents who have a vested interest in the schools. Virtually all adult members of the community have to pay taxes which go, in part, toward the funding of schools; and all members of the community are affected by nature and quality of school graduates since the schools will provide new citizens who are, or are not, literate, numerate, technically skilled, thoughtful, creative and so on. So, we could include, along with parents, any adult member of the community. Since most of the cases made for curriculum control by adult members of the community are made on behalf of parents who presently have school age children, I do not want to drop the reference to 'parents' in favour of 'adults'. Still, cases are sometimes made for all adult members of the community; so where we come across them I will make special mention.

As for the scope of decision-making, 'parent-power' supporters run the gamut from wanting individual parents (or parent couples) to determine what school their child should attend from among the available alternatives (or by insistance that the state ought to provide a greater range of alternatives) to nominating parents for control over the programme of their neighbourhood school to suggesting that parents ought to directly participate in the classroom. The range includes all manner of decisions <u>about</u> macro and micro activities and those <u>within</u> both. Now some parents, or community members, only want a <u>say</u> in these matters. Our concern at the moment, however, is only with those who want <u>control</u>, not to share it with, say, teachers. We will consider sharing arrangements in a separate chapter on 'participation'.

And, how is it that parents could be seen making these decisions? They could have a choice of alternative neighbourhood schools as many boards in North America allow. Or, school vouchers redeemable anywhere within a country or province would vastly increase the number of options.[1] Such proposals enable parents to select a pre-packaged macro activity programme and procedures from alternatives at hand. Alternatively, political, ethnic or religious groups often want to determine (or sometimes only influence) the programme of the macro activity by stipulating its aims and describing the atmosphere and attitudes of the school. Marxists, for example, might see the school as an instrument of class warfare and prescribe its aims accordingly. Feminists, Blacks,[2] North American Indians,[3] religious groups such as the Mennonites,[4] etc. sometimes have in common their desire to promote group interests and ideologies through the aims etc. of schools. (These are often influenced indirectly by parents having control of hiring teachers or headmasters.) Influence and control over micro activities is often of less concern to parents; nevertheless some radicals have become so discouraged with available schools they have started their own.[5] Thus, decisions at all levels can be made by a parent committee-of-the-whole (provided, of course, that the school is small enough). Short of such drastic actions are situations where parents enter classrooms and offer elective (optional) courses to students,[6] thus enabling control of some micro activities.

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[1]A classic presentation of this idea comes from Milton Friedman in Capitalism and Freedom (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969). It also appears in G. West, Education and the State (London: Institute of Economic Affairs, 1965), and J. Wiseman, 'Vouchers for Education', Economics of Education II, ed. M. Blaug (Hammondsworth Middx.: Penguin, 1970). For rather more recent support see Rhodes Boyson, The Voucher in Schooling (National Education Association, 1972); and Noel Pauly, Pay to Learn (London: Selsdon Group, 1977).

[2]See J.M. Cronin, The Control of Urban Schools (New York: The Free Press, 1973), Chapter VIII, 'Returning Control to the Community'.

[3]See 'Statement of the Indian Philosophy of Education', a summary from Indian Control of Indian Education. Presented to the Minister of Indian Affairs (Canada) by the National Indian Brotherhood.

[4]See M.I. Assheton-Smith and K. Toohey, 'School-Centered Community Conflict: The Holdeman Mennonite Case in Alberta' forthcoming in the Alberta Journal of Educational Research, and various presentations made by the Mennonites to Canadian provincial Departments of Education.

[5]See Jonathan Kozol, Free Schools (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972).

[6]Kozol, op. cit., p. 65 and James Benet 'Parents and a Dream School' in Don Davies ed., Schools Where Parents Make a Difference (Boston: Institute for Responsive Education, 1976), pp. 36-7.

As well, (some) parents can take over some micro activity decision-making by acting as a teacher's aid. Proposals of this sort are very common among supporters of the community education movement, now quite strong in North America. Though it takes a great many forms, the central idea is that school and community should be brought closer together. One result is that parents often take over much of the decision-making at all levels. And, some parents do not demand a decision-making role as much as the right to object to certain types of content or pedagogical activity and have appropriate action taken.[7]

(a) Some Justifications

Justifications are not often found in the popular literature, and even less frequently given much supportive argument; but certain lines of argument can be summarised. There is, for example, the claim in respect of parents making curriculum decisions (whichever they may be) whether through vouchers, controllers of alternative schools, etc., for their own children, that parents have a human right to determine the actions of their children - schooling included. During the industrial revolution parental rights to child control were seen as being inalienable. That is, under no circumstances whatsoever could there be legal interference in parent-child relations. In Britain this began to change only in the latter part of the nineteenth century with the Education Act (1880), Children's Charter (1889), formation of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (1904) and the Young Person's Act (1933), all of which were moves to recognize the rights of children not to be harmed.[8] This is of interest to us because it raises the issue of competing rights to freedom as between parents and children, something which the United Nations declaration of Human Rights recognized in article twenty-six when it claimed that every child has the right to an education. Now it may be unclear who the right to positive performance of providing that education is to be claimed against, or what the basis for the rights claim is; but if children have (or ought to have) such a right (morally), however it is justified, and our argument has presumed this from the very beginning; it follows that parents cannot (morally)

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[7]Philip and Susan Jones, Parents Unite!(Wyden Books, 1976), p. 101.

[8]For a very interesting discussion of parental power and its diminution see F. Musgrove, The Family, Education and Society (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), Chapter One.

stand in the way of a child's education. Since we have further presumed that the child's right is to the best efforts by parents and society to provide the best possible education under the (local) circumstances, it follows as well that the education ought to be given by those who are most competent to do so (ceterus peribus). In consequence, if our assumptions are correct, the justification for parent rights hinges upon a limiting condition of superior competence. That is, the parental right to control of their children has, in respect to the education of children, a condition of superior competence which, if not fulfilled, limits their freedom. The question about their ability to satisfy this condition will be dealt with shortly.

A second line of justification for direct parental control might take either of two forms. First, a parent couple might claim that they are more competent than others in determining the needs of their children and how those needs may be best met. The explanation for this is usually on grounds of the intimacy of parent-child relations; and its justificatory power could legitimize decisions ranging from the selection of schools through vouchers to decisions about both programme and procedures of schooling as would be possible if a parent were selecting a child's educational activities in a free school, to micro activity decisions as could be the case if a parent were to offer courses in a community school, and so on. Presumably, however, this line of justification would weaken wherever a parent had to make judgments about children other than his or her own, since the intimacy factor would lessen. Hence it would be difficult for a group of parents to make decisions (macro or micro) on this basis for a group of (their) children, unless parents all found that after assessing the needs of their own children there were common needs requiring fulfillment by similar means. For example, parents of a gifted child might believe in the child's need for intensive study in particular areas such as math and science, and band together with other like-minded parents with gifted children to form an alternative school.

The second form of this line of justification almost begins at the point the first stops. For it could be argued that parent groups are especially competent to determine needs - not so much the children's needs, though, as the needs of the society, community or group to which the parents and children belong. Minorities and special interest groups such as Blacks, North American Indians, feminists and Mennonites often claim that group identity and values are dependent upon certain courses being taught (e.g. the place of women in literature, history and science) and taught in particular way (e.g. in a native language) by particular

people (e.g. Blacks, women, religious sects, etc. being taught by members of the respective group).

There are some problems to do with justification on the basis of needs, to which I would like to draw attention. Indeed I think the matter can, for the most part, be collapsed into the issue of parental competence. By way of a preliminary comment on 'needs', whether needs of the child, group or whatever, we might note that they are quite different in logical form from either 'wants' or 'interest' with which confusion, or conflation, is often found. To start with interests and wants: presumably one could want an X if one had no interest in it. Indeed, to want a new car, an ice-cream cone or a book is to be interested in having one. On the other hand, though, to be interested in X is not necessarily to want it. A bizarre sculpture may hold one's interest without developing in one the slightest desire, or want, to own or possess it.

Both of these, however, differ quite markedly from needs. First, one may need things that are neither wanted nor have interest. When one has the flu, for example, nutritious foods are needed but often, because of nausea and taste loss, are not interesting or wanted. Equally, one may be interested in, or want, a new car; yet it may not be needed. Second, to need X, rather than to be interested in it or to want it, is to require it for something else, Y.[9] While one may want, or be interested in, sex or a piece of sculpture for nothing other than its own sake, one would only be said to need either if a requisite for something outside itself, e.g. needing a particular piece of sculpture to complete one's collection.

Both Wilson and Woods and Barrow stress the implications of 'needs implies objectives or goals';[10] and this is important for our concerns. For one thing, there is an evaluative component, often overlooked in needs-talk. If something is judged to be needed, and therefore needed for something else, a question can be asked about the worthiness of the objective. For example, if a student were to need courses in computer technology for perpetrating computer frauds later on in business, it would be reasonable to ask whether this need should be satisfied given

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[9]See P.S. Wilson, Interest and Discipline in Education (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), Chapter One; R.G. Woods and R. St. C. Barrow, in Introduction to Philosophy of Education (London: Methuen, 1975), pp. 117-22, to whom the following discussion owes much.

[10]Ibid.

the student's ends. As well, needs themselves are subject to evaluation in their own right. An innocuous objective such as gaining peer-group respect may, in order to bring it about, need of a young boy, that he pick fights with other boys. This may be a need, but should it be fulfilled? So, our first point with regard to parents as decision-makers is to indicate that if it is they who are left to ascertain the needs either of children or the community, then evaluation of alleged needs and objectives will be necessary. Furthermore, since evaluation of needs (and objectives) in curriculum requires of parents, the would-be decision-makers, certain epistemic credentials, the certification of parents becomes, at least in this regard, one of competence.

Against the claim about the evaluation component being built into needs-talk and hence about the precarious epistemic position into which this puts the parent decision-maker, is this possible counter-argument. Some, and probably the most important, curriculum decisions are based on the cognitive development of children. If there is a psychological model of cognitive development, a counterpart, for example, to the biological model of plant growth, and certain essential conditions of development or growth, i.e. needs, can be elucidated, then the evaluative element will be removed in light of thereby having a descriptive theory which need only be applied by parents in order to make decisions about needs. In other words, if a theory of cognitive development such as Piaget's is a satisfactory descriptive account of 'child-growth' as would be a theory about plant growth; and if it mentioned the needs for growth, just as water and sunlight is needed by a plant; then parents would need only to observe the signs of a child going through the growth cycle and, as with giving water to plants, satisfy his or her needs.

This counter-argument does not work; and in showing why, further credence is given to our statement about the importance of requisite epistemic credentials of decision-makers. First, the counter-argument fails because cognitive theories are necessarily prescriptive not descriptive. Consequently, the evaluative component - i.e. assessing the worthiness of the cognitive development theory would still remain. Why are cognitive theories prescriptive? A developmental theory about cognition presumes an end - the fully developed human - just as plant development theories are based on notions of a fully developed plant of one type or another. However, what constitutes a fully developed plant is a matter of observation - its end-states can be determined by watching it grow under standard conditions. But, we cannot just watch humans grow in order to determine their end-state - their being human. For what they become depends upon the (standard) conditions which prevail

as they grow. Indeed, they can be made to grow one way or another (though, granted, they are not infinitely determinable) as the conditions are changed. What should the end-state be, though? The answer is that there is simply not a specifiable end-state that can be determined by observation as being 'human', to the exclusion of other possible descriptions. The matter of being a fully developed human (cognitively speaking) depends upon what you take 'human' to be; and this is inescapably a matter of evaluation. This being so, it would make the parent's decision-making that much more in need of epistemic backing. This is the second point. To determine the needs of a child (ignoring those of the community for the moment) would necessitate having a reasonably sophisticated understanding of what could be meant by being human, cognitive theories and the children about whom decisions are being made. It is one thing for a parent to have a solid understanding of his or her child's desires, but quite another to comprehend needs as thus described.

Apart from the evaluative component of needs is a further point which is very much an extension of the epistemic items just mentioned. It is that identification of genuine needs can be a very difficult matter. When something is alleged to be needed for self-realization, happiness, etc., a decision-maker must be capable of making these ends more explicit. Otherwise needs-talk becomes trivial: virtually anything can be construed as needed for self-realization unless the latter can be made less vague. What is more, even when goals or objectives are unequivocally stated it is not always clear that one needs what one thinks one does; and this applies not only to the needs of children but the needs of communities. Does a child really need to attend a military school to achieve self-discipline? Is an in-depth study of a discipline needed in order to be imaginative within the bounds of that discipline? Is vocational education in schools needed by a community to ensure that its essential services, etc. will be staffed in the future? In order to preserve its identity, does an ethnic community need to have its young instructed in its own customs and language? None of the answers to these needs-questions are obvious. They present problems, the solution to which requires a considerable knowledge of individuals or communities in general, as well as specifics about those in question.

There is, finally, the matter of whether or not a curriculum and all therein ought to be based solely on needs. A somewhat refined taste for literature, drama, music and the visual arts, a sophisticated understanding of historical, political and economic trends, and much else besides, might well be regarded as spheres into which it would be desirable (from everyone's point of view) to introduce students. Yet, inclusion of

these in the curriculum may not satisfy any needs. I think it is clear that justifications in and about curriculum must involve more than needs.

In consequence, I want to suggest that (a) the argument from needs will not, of itself, justify parental control of curriculum and (b) to the limited extent that it could, the entire matter can be collapsed into a general discussion of parental decision-making competence. For the knowledge requisites of determining needs of children and communities are very similar to those needed for curriculum decision-making in general. Therefore, I suggest that the answer to (b) can be provided by considering parental decision-making competence in light of the conditions of competence we have worked out in an earlier chapter.

Before going on however, it should be mentioned that there are other arguments to justify parental involvement in curriculum. For example, it is frequently contended that a closer connection must be drawn between home and school, and that this cannot exist if parents are given no responsibility for the school. Alternatively, it could be maintained that parental involvement would provide a check on the vested interests of the teaching profession and the local education authorities. One sort of reply to this would be that they still hinge on competence; and the other would be that such arguments are more commonly made to support the case for parents having some form of participation rather than control. To the extent the former is true, it can be dealt with by the discussion about competence to follow. Inasmuch as it is the latter, they will be considered more fully in the chapter devoted to participation.

2. Are Parents Competent?

Our judgments about parental competence will vary depending upon which individuals comprise the social category of 'parent' in a particular location and time. For geniuses and idiots can be parents; and even where generalizations can safely be made about competence among one group of parents, the generalization may not hold with other groups (cf. British and Brazilian parents). And, over time, incompetent parents may improve significantly, and vice versa. Equally, competence applies to specific (types of) activities, each of which has its own list of epistemic prerequisites. To satisfy one list of conditions is not necessarily to satisfy others. To assess competence in curriculum, therefore, it becomes necessary to examine piecemeal the various types of decision which might be left to parents.

Given these contingencies, it is of great importance that the

following two provisions be noted. First, the search for the most competent curriculum decision-maker is based on an assessment of who best fulfills the conditions of competence in educational activities. Where there is reasonable doubt about the soundness of generalizations made about any group of parents in any time or place, there must be an immediate retreat to the conditions of competence and a reassessment of the candidate.

Second, the parents with whom we will be concerned are those in Western democratic nations. Within these, we will refer to 'parents in the general case', with all due recognition of the vagueness of the phrase and attention to difficulties to which it gives rise.

(a) Decisions About the Macro Activity

Decisions about the programme and procedures (i.e. the aggregate of micro activities) can be divided into two questions: (a) Who is most competent to set out and explain the alternatives (and justifications)? (b) who is most competent to choose among the alternatives? Our purpose is to ask if we can say 'parents' to either of these.

(i) <u>The knowledge condition and selection of alternatives</u>

With regard to (a), it was claimed in an earlier chapter that school programmes (descriptions, aims, etc.) could be decided about only if a listing of theoretical alternatives could be made: that is, a list of <u>types</u> of schools and corresponding aims and objectives of the schools so described. What knowledge would be required to prepare such a list? Prior direct or indirect knowledge of such schools would enable a rough characterization of items on the list; obviously the more sophisticated one's knowledge, the better the list. For example, if one had remotely heard of community schools but never visited one, one's characterization of them would probably be rather superficial, moreso than if one had studied them thoroughly. We must, however, stop short of saying that prior knowledge of all schools to be listed is logically necessary, because new conceptions of schools are only possible if we can go beyond present knowledge. Still, one does not conceive of schools without considerable knowledge of other types of school, for one must have some criterion to judge whether the new conception even counts as a school - and if so, whether or not a reasonably good school. So, the areas from which would come the knowledge essential to preparation of the list would be, as previously indicated, philosophy and history of education and comparative education. And, added to the 'theoretical descriptions'

of alternatives would have to be the anticipated 'pragmatic outcomes' (which is necessary for a complete statement of an alternative). Required would be, in general terms, personal knowledge of the individuals involved (i.e. students, teachers and parents) and knowledge of social and economic factors. Pertinent here would be the areas of psychology, sociology, and economics.

One would have to be rather generous in the case of parents to suppose that they would have sufficient knowledge to prepare a sophisticated list. Even parents who keep themselves up to date on the developments within, for example, comprehensive schooling, would not necessarily understand very much about open classrooms or French Lycées. To have heard of the latter is not necessarily to clearly understand the details of description or aspects of programme such as aims. Furthermore, if a parent did have a good grasp of the theoretical description, it is hard to see how he or she could apply the knowledge of material and conceptual context of their circumstances (assuming they are at least in command of this) to predict pragmatic outcomes of implementing, for example, open classrooms or Lycées. Even professional psychologists, sociologists and economists have difficulty with accurrate predictions of this sort. In consequence, macro activity decisions, insofar as <u>setting out alternatives</u> for the programme of schooling is concerned, would best not be left in the hands of parents. So, if one were to ask 'What sort of schools should we have in Britain, Canada, Australia, etc.? or, What school should I send my child to in Britain, etc.?', it would be far from ideal, in the general case, to ask parents for a listing. (Remember, we are only concerned with suggested alternatives here, not final decisions.)

A second type of macro activity decision, which arises after a programme has been adopted or is under consideration, concerns the selection of <u>procedures</u> that will govern action within the macro activity. Not only are administrative and moral directives (e.g. rules against running in the halls and corporal punishment) to be included, but the structural features (rules and principles) of disciplines and teaching as well. Since the procedures of the macro activity will be the sum of the procedures (rules, etc.) of the micro activities, to select the former will, at the same time, be to decide which micro activities will combine to form the macro activity. So, for a government to decide what will be the structure of one type of school which it will consider funding (e.g. open classroom schools), there is the question 'Which micro activities (e.g. integrated study of science, math, etc.) should be included?' These, therefore, will be decisions about

what and when children will learn. What subjects? What balance of subjects? What depth? What breadth? What age is appropriate for introducing children to certain subjects or parts of them? And so on. We claimed in an earlier chapter that such decisions would involve, in the theoretical description of alternatives, knowledge of disciplines, content, methods of teaching each and knowledge of learning theory. In assessing pragmatic outcomes of implementing any of these, it would be necessary to predict the likely outcomes of implementing any one of the alternatives which would demand of us that we have knowledge of the individuals and groups who would encounter these alternatives. For the most part, psychology, sociology and economics would be the servicing fields.

Would parents, in the general case, know what the alternatives are? In some instances parents are quite familiar with particular types of school. Romantically remembered experiences of one's own school days are often not very accurate, but parents who, for example, take a keen interest in the school attended by their children and who keep abreast of contemporary debates, often know a great deal. Moreover, some schools strongly encourage parental interest (especially in alternative and community schools) which increases yet again parental understanding of the present school structure, which in turn, provides the basis for thinking of alternatives. So, one could build the case for parents as decision-makers, albeit at its strongest, in the possibility of them being, or at least becoming, well informed about schools - perhaps even about a range of types of schools. And then to this, would have to be added consideration of pragmatic outcomes. One could argue here that parents would be quite capable of assessing the practical consequences of having history or sex-education on the curriculum, or integrated days, cafeteria curriculum or whatever, given the considerable extent to which such decisions are matters of common sense. At least so it would seem on first inspection.

We are virtually forced to say that surely some parents will understand the subtleties of the programme and the range of reasonable alternative micro activities (e.g. the study of history, math, etc.) well enough to propose, competently, alternatives. But the question is, would the knowledge of even a well informed and educated group of parents match that of either educational experts (e.g. government departments of education) or teachers whose professional occupation it is to deal in this knowledge? I would think the answer to be, no. Not a resounding no; but a firm one. The weakness in the parents' case has to do with the inability to adequately assess pragmatic outcomes of

prospective alternatives. For a proposed educational activity is only a genuine alternative if it can reasonably be brought about. Surely parents can assess this insofar as larger implications for the family and, perhaps as well, the community are concerned. But can they tell what is teachable? No matter how much the parent likes the idea of his child learning Greek or medieval history, the successful teaching of it is dependent upon, among other things, the readiness and, equally as crucial, the child's willingness. Parents often fail to see the complexities of execution of alternatives in this regard, and, in consequence, the activities they suggest to comprise the macro activity are not always possible.

(ii) The knowledge condition and choosing among the alternatives: final choices

Faced with a list of programme alternatives, or alternative micro activities to be combined to make a macro activity, could parents choose competently? Would they have sufficient knowledge in the areas of psychology, sociology, economics and philosophy from which would come 'justifying principles' on the basis of which choices could be made?

On the first matter, parents might be faced either with choosing among pre-established school programmes, as, for example, would lie the case when a parent decides whether to send his or her child to a grammar, comprehensive or open classroom school, or with choosing which among competing programme descriptions ought to be adopted by a school (or, perhaps, school board, in North America), a situation which might occur, for instance, when a community school is being planned. Now, in the latter example, it would be a further consideration to determine procedures. This is the second matter mentioned in the last paragraph. It should have a separate answer to the question about competence because it has more of a technical element than the former; we will come to this in a moment.

Concerning the programme, then, a decision about which school to send one's child to, after the alternatives have been fully set out, hinges on the justificatory principle to be employed in sorting out the preferred alternative. What would such principles be? In an earlier chapter we rejected the possibility of sorting out alternatives simply on the basis of a conceptual analysis of 'education' or 'educational activities'. For, on the one hand, the concepts are so vague that we could never get much satisfaction from asking a question such as 'Is an open classroom school more educational than a comprehensive school or military academy?'. Not all of us mean the same thing by 'educational',

so it is no use appealing to usage for a specific meaning. We could get rid of the vagueness by stipulating a meaning, but then it would be necessary to justify acting (deciding) on the basis of the stipulation. And such a justification would necessarily appeal to principles external to 'education', which is the position we find ourselves in now. Consequently, other principles have to be considered, such as the development of creativity, reasonableness, critical thought, vocational preparation, happiness of the child, benefits to the community and much else besides. Since many of the principles are the same as the principles being considered as constitutive of the macro activity programme, selection of programme principles sometimes becomes almost a matter of faith. That is, for example, a school is judged to be properly guided by a commitment to develop creativity, because creativity is seen as self-justifying.

Now what the educational experts have been, to some extent, successful in doing, has been to clarify the meanings of such principles and to explain the logical, psychological, sociological and economic conditions under which these principles can be fulfilled. But, which principle or combination of them is correct, is a question not satisfactorily answered. That creativity is preferable to reasonableness or vocational preparation is something on which authoritativeness appears dubious. There is no consensus among, say, philosophers on which principles are central, nor is there agreement on higher order principles that would enable us to find out. It would be too strong to say that such a thing is logically impossible; but the very fact that it is so dubious is sufficient grounds, for our practical purpose, to claim that at the present, the argument from authority cannot stand against parental decision-making. And are parents competent? Prima facie, it would seem that they are. One would have to take a very dim view of their intellectual abilities to stand against this, and be willing to argue as well, that the common man in western society is equally incapable of having a sufficient knowledge, in depth, breadth and centrality, of justifying principles to choose a government. The political choice, is after all, much the same as choosing one's child's school - either, which school to send him to or what the (community) school should be like.

The matter of procedures is slightly different. Deciding whether to include physical education, music, dance, moral education courses, political science and specialized courses in physics, etc. is partly dependent upon the same principles which are central to programme decisions, but, as well, partly dependent upon the extent to which such

activities are compatible with the elements of programme, and compatible among themselves. Hence a decision about whether to include music and dance in the macro activity could be justified by a parent's allegiances to the principle of creativity in education, and, perhaps, supported by the fact of creativity being one of the school's aims (programme principles). But an important consideration, as well, is the pedagogical justification. The particular courses may be too advanced for the students in question. The music class, for example, might presuppose a level of sophistication in music theory which the students do not have and the parents cannot judge. Or, the particular courses might be too esoteric. That is, it may not be pedagogically sound to introduce children to music through classical compositions or esoteric forms of jazz. For regardless of the wants of parents, the children may not be sufficiently motivated, or such courses may not provide a suitable background for other courses in music which the parents have also decided they want their children to have.

It is the importance of these pedagogical principles to decisions about procedures, in macro spheres (this qualification is necessary since there are many procedural matters in the domain of micro activities) that militates against parental competence. Therefore, I would draw the line for parental control between programme and procedure decisions. It is hardly inconceivable, though, to imagine a great many laymen who are sufficiently well versed in these pedagogical principles, or who could be tutored in them. It should, perhaps, be a line of chalk!

(iii) Parents, macro activities and knowledge: conclusion

It is no act of intellectual charity to credit parents in Western nations with considerable knowledge and understanding of schools. Certainly a significant majority have completed secondary school themselves and a large minority have attended university. Consequently, it seems unwarranted to say that they lack depth, breadth or centrality of knowledge of principles on the basis of which to make decisions about the programme of a school or to choose to which school to send their children. However, it would be no surprise to find a great many parents limited in their knowledge of educational principles necessary to making macro decisions about procedures. Equally, doubts could be raised about the depth and breadth of parental knowledge of alternative programmes. Hence, it would be dangerous for parents to determine the range of alternative schools that a society should accommodate or consider, though not so dangerous for them to choose among the alternative schools listed

by those with greater knowledge (i.e. educational experts).

(iv) Macro activities, competence and the abilities condition and access to data

In light of the two remaining conditions of competence have we any reason to alter our judgment about parents as macro activity decision-makers? The answer is, I think, a safe, no. Although we have obvious worries about generalizing, it seems reasonable to suppose that, on the whole, parents will have, in adequate supply, the intellectual and affective abilities requisite of decisions about such things as the sort of school their children should attend and the sort of school (i.e. the programme of) their community school should be. To reuse a point made earlier, if parents were not possessed of such abilities, the whole democratic practice of weighing political issues and electing governments would be undercut. Since there is little evidence to suggest the incompetence of the body politic (which includes most parents) in these regards, it seems reasonable to assume that similar educational decisions are not beyond their grasp.

The pragmatic condition of access to data is satisfactorily fulfilled in making most judgments about selection of a child's school and decisions about what a school programme should be like. Parents, after all, are usually a part of the material and conceptual contexts in which the school would exist. Resources of a community, school board, etc. available to alternative schools being considered are matters on which adequate information is not difficult for a parent to acquire. Equally, the values of a community (part of the conceptual context) are usually shared by the parent, or known to him or her; so in this regard, the parent's vantage point is satisfactory.

(b) Decisions About and Within Micro Activities

The range of decisions here is from concerns about the subject content of micro activities - i.e. what the activity will be about, to concerns about how and when that content is to be taught and learned - i.e. what goes on within the micro activity. The latter, of course, involves not only such important pedagogical matters as the teaching strategies, materials, class visits and group projects, but, as well, such trivial matters as, for example, the brand of art supplies to be used and the arrangements for transporting children to the museum. Consequently, failure to be optimally competent in one area is not necessarily failure in another.

(i) The knowledge condition

The division in questions between (a) who ought to select alternatives? and (b) who ought to judge among pre-selected alternatives? could be made here, but is not so important as will become evident as we proceed. Our main concern, then, is in choosing groups of decisions along the micro activity range and testing for competence.

As the object of a micro activity decision, consider, for example, the content of a history course. That a history course should be taught at all is a macro activity decision; but decisions about the specific subject matter, topics, themes and interpretations, are decisions about a micro activity. To formulate such alternatives requires more than simply an appreciation of history as a 'form of knowledge' - i.e. that, as a discipline, its central concepts are the like of social customs, artifacts, government, conflict, causal relations, means of production and so forth, all in relation to one another and in the past. Necessary as well is an understanding of specific historical periods - descriptions and explanations of them. Authoritative knowledge, or origional insight, would surely not be needed for curriculum matters, but it would be necessary to have considerable familiarity; that is, to be a bit of an historian. But having such a background would especially equip an individual to fulfill only part of the requirement for presenting an alternative completely. For a theoretical understanding would only enable a theoretical description. Pragmatic outcomes, the other component, would be dependent upon acute perceptions of the practical likelihood of various options actually working in class.

Now most parents in Western nations have studied history in school. So the claim to being an historian, if only of low standing, has some initial plausibility. But to what level did they study? And how does this level relate to the varying (grade or form) levels of study in schools? To have done A-levels in history better prepares an historian than O-levels, and they better than none at all. (Assuming, of course, that a programme of independent study has not been undertaken.) But does having taken an A-level in history prepare one to plan the content of courses for future A-levels students; or does it qualify one, perhaps, to determine contents for lower level courses? One would think surely more the latter than the former. But as against potential decision-makers with university degrees in history, one might suggest they pale even in the latter. However, I do not think this is always so. It is not obvious that it takes the level of sophistication of a university graduate to map out the contours of an elementary level history course. Nor does it seem obvious that having an appreciation for the

subtleties of historical explanation makes one better able to prepare the bluntly contoured elementary course. Surely the research chemist's tea is not better tasting then the housewife's. So, if in our illustrating case of history, decisions about course content, the concern was only about preparation of theoretical descriptions of course content alternatives, I would be inclined to support parent control at elementary levels where adequate prior training in history could be demonstrated. But it is not that simple.

To start with, we have chosen to discuss content in a school subject, history, with which most parents would be familiar (since in many places it is compulsory). However, a great many parents would not have studied Latin, physics or integrated programmes (e.g. Russian studies, which could be composed of Russian geography, history, literature and language); hence we could not say that all parents would be competent to make decisions about all subjects. Rather, as with the case of history, the population would have to be divided into those with prior training in certain subjects, and then further sorted into levels of competence in order to determine the (grade or form) level at which decisions could be made. Doing this would, of course, necessitate a change in the original question about parental competence, because at the outset we asked whether parents as a group could decide about curriculum, without further qualification. However, it will not be necessary to make any amendment, for I want to suggest that theoretical knowledge of subject content is not the main problem.

What is problematic is the level of understanding parents have of the activity within which decisions are to be made, namely the teaching of history, or whatever. Recall that in the analysis given of activity structure it was claimed that activities are not simply understood or not. Rather, among those who can be said to understand (well enough to be genuine participants), different levels of sophistication are possible. This has both a qualitative and quantitative side. The subtlety, nuance and intimations of programme and procedures joins with the extended range of rules, especially informal rules such as strategy and technique, to make possible a gradation in levels of authoritative and profound understanding, in contrast with the pedestrian and mundane. The argument against parents in this regard is, in a way, a version of the 'secret garden' argument. Intelligent individuals, with appropriate training and relevant knowledge are capable of coming to understand an activity at the higher levels largely by experience in the activity - by 'dwelling in the garden'. Parents do not dwell in the

garden and by and large they do not have the necessary background to understand what they can see over the garden wall. They do not recognize much of what passes before them nor do they always appreciate the significance of what they see.

To put it in more concrete terms, what they lack is understanding of the way to go about teaching - those countless informal rules that inform the teacher of when to increase the pace, when to slow down or do revisions, when to add a bit of humour, when to stop the joke, when to confront a misbehaving student, when to let him alone and so on. In other words, what must be known is what will work in the classroom and what will not - what are the viable alternatives. A self-directed course in Medieval European history might sound to the layman like a good idea - good in theory - but experienced teachers who know the subject and relevant teaching considerations might not agree.

It is not just a matter of practical wisdom or having the ability to deal with people. It is, too, knowing how to organize oneself for action and knowing the 'tricks of the trade'. Now in the coming chapter which deals with teachers as curriculum decision-makers, I will work out in much greater detail the 'argument from experience'. For now, though, I think it is clear that parents would lack sufficiently in this regard to make them highly suspect in terms of competence.

At the beginning of this section I said that not much needed to be made of the distinction between decisions which determine lists of alternatives and decisions which make the choice among them. With regard to macro activities it could be seen that parents were sometimes competent to do the latter though not the former. With decisions <u>about</u> micro activities, it is plain that parents are not competent to do either. For choices among, for example, pre-selected alternative history course contents would be justified by, for the most part, principles to do with pedagogy and the standards of the discipline in question. For example, selection among alternative topics to comprise a course in Medieval European history would be justified, at least in part, by appeal to such discipline standards as centrality of importance to an understanding of the period. These are not areas in which we could reasonably expect parental competence.

A second area of questions to do with micro activities are those <u>within</u> the bounds of a micro activity. These would be use of teaching strategies, projects and so forth. Much the same line of argument against parts would be put here; there is no point to rehearsing it again. Suffice it to say that without special training a layman's only vision of such matters is from outside 'the garden wall'.

However, some micro activity decisions are far less technical than others; as well, some have less severe consequences if made incorrectly. In such cases as these the argument from competence against parental control disappears. For example, students in a junior school social studies programme might be thought to benefit from a visit to either a newspaper or a police station or the fire station or some other community service centre. Where there is no pedagogical preference, there would be no reason why parents could not decide. Matters of this sort would be on a par with such non-curriculum concerns as school uniforms, length of boys' hair and so on. So, although these are not particularly important matters, it is worth pointing them out to show that not everything in the garden is secret.

Before going on to consider parents in the light of the other two conditions of competence, there is a counter-argument that must be dealt with. It is, as the Taylor Committee suggested, that parents do not have the knowledge required to make many of these decisions because they have never been invited into the garden - hence never had the opportunity, or perhaps motive, to learn. Conceivably, therefore, if parents were given control of some aspects of curriculum they would learn what is needed - they may even be given various training courses.

Assuming that our concern is with parents as a whole, rather than those few who would participate in decision-making as school governors, etc., for this situation will be considered in another chapter, this seems rather far-fetched. It is conceivable, if rather optimistic, that parents would attempt to learn about curriculum if given control. (This does not seem to be borne out in North America, however, where parents can have a large say in school board appointments and through contact in parent-teacher associations, yet where parental willingness to involve themselves has long been a problem.) But to think that all, or even a majority of parents, would take, as it were, upgrading classes would surely over-extend even an optimist's imagination. But even if parents did become more interested and took classes as well, would the result be epistemic competence? I fail to see how this 'low-brow' version of a teacher training course would raise parents' understandings of the various disciplines, pedagogy and the subtleties of teaching to match that of the professional teacher whose working life is devoted to such matters. This is to have either a very high opinion of parental competence, or a very low opinion of teachers.

While I think the bulk of the case against allowing parents to make important micro decisions stems from their lack of knowledge, one could also point to the other class of conditions which decision-makers must

fulfill apart from knowledge, namely, cognitive and affective abilities and access to data.

(ii) The abilities condition and access to data

It would be foolish, I am sure, to speculate about what portions of the adult population have developed the intellectual and personal excellences which we have claimed to be so important in making correct decisions; though it was not so difficult to do this with students since we could present a fairly strong psychological argument about intellectual immaturity. However, in the realm of emotional, or affective, characteristics there is at least one point - a significant one - about parental deficiency vis a vis decision-making which should be mentioned.

What I have in mind is not so much an emotional immaturity as simply a factor which interferes with a parent's ability to make rational choices.[11] It is this. While maturity can be safely assumed of parents, at least in the general case, we cannot always presume that parents will have good judgment when making decisions about matters in which they have great emotional involvement. In short, parents, as most classroom teachers can attest, have a tendency to think well of their children, i.e. to assume them to be well behaved and highly intelligent. Parents are sometimes not very objective. One unfortunate consequence of this is that they sometimes overrate their own child's ability to perform. Hence, a parent in charge of arranging his child's curriculum, as is the case in many schools nowadays (given the widespread cafeteria curriculum), may press him into areas for which he has no aptitude, blinded by false confidence.[12] This is not to be taken as a fatal objection to the case for parents; but it is a serious consideration.

(c) The Verdict on Parents

The same inexorable difficulty of making a simple statement about

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[11] See R.S. Peters' article 'Freedom and the Development of the Free Man', in J.F. Doyle ed., Educational Judgments (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), for a useful discussion of some psychological factors that interfere with or prevent rational choice, both in the development of one's capacity and the ways it can be stymied.

[12] F. Musgrove, in Family, Education and Society, op. cit., p. 135 maintains that 'The ambitions of parents for their children bear a closer relationship to their social class position than to the demonstrated abilities of the child'.

decision-making competence exists in the case of parents as with students. For the competence criteria of knowledge cognitive and affective abilities and access to data are logically independent of parenthood. That is, if A is a parent, there is no necessary connection between his being a parent and being either a competent or non competent decision-maker. We are left, therefore, to evaluate competence on the basis of generalizations about parent populations and their ability to fulfill the conditions of competence. Given that competence in curriculum matters depends largely upon knowledge of various sorts; that the type of knowledge differs with the type of decision; that some parents may have none of the knowledge, some, some of the knowledge, i.e. some knowledge for the entire range of decisions or, enough knowledge to make some decisions (e.g. macro activity decisions) but not others, and even a modicum of parents who have adequate knowledge to make a great many macro and micro decisions; it follows that determining competence is precarious at best. Still, it is important to make this judgment, even if it must be heavily qualified. For, just as we must, for the sake of democracy, consider Plato's problem of the competence of citizens to make political judgments (e.g. about leaders), we must, for the sake of educating the young, determine who is most capable of controlling the school curriculum. And, in view of the arguments in this chapter, it seems reasonable to suppose that only certain macro and micro issues should be within the control of parents. (Participation is another matter.) These are such macro decisions as selection of the programme of a school from pre-presented options (as in the case of a community school) or choice of a school (existent macro activity) for one's own child. Equally, some micro activities which are non technical and of less than significant consequence if made in error ought to be within the domain of parents. For other curriculum matters, parents ought not to have control.

Chapter VIII

EXPERTS AND CURRICULUM DECISION-MAKING

1. Introduction

We have taken the view that the consequences of misjudgment in schooling can be severe. Some members of the educational community are little concerned by this, e.g. free school supporters, while others regard it with alarm. Many in the latter category suppose that minimization of risk (and sometimes maximization of benefits) can be best achieved if our closest approximations to philosopher-kings make the important decisions, namely educational experts.

In law or medicine such a proposal would meet with little resistance, but in education this is not so. The problem is not an unavailability of those claiming to have expertise. Nor is it any of the stumbling blocks to which students, and parents succumbed, such as intellectual immaturity or inadequate understanding of educational issues. Oddly enough, in the first line of debate, the questionable factor is whether or not there is an adequate body of educational theory to make sensible any talk of educational experts. Some people argue that we do not have dependable theories in education like in engineering, hence we ought not to rely on the so-called experts. Others take the stronger opposition posture that theories in education are, in principle, not possible; if by 'theory' we mean a set of law-like statements as in natural sciences. And still others, in the second line of debate, take the interesting view that even if theories were possible and available, we would not require them in education anyway; hence we have no need of experts.

My intention is to investigate the status of educational theory and the arguments against theorists - experts. First, however, some important clarifications need to be made. The conditions for being an expert must be outlined. We must mention who claims to be the educational expert. And I want to make some observations about the characteristic functions of experts: these will be very important in assessing their claim to authority. Ultimately my objective will be to show that experts, or at least some of them, ought not to control curriculum, though not for the reasons currently being advanced.

2. Educational Experts

(a) What is an Expert?

We could hardly prescribe expert control without identifying those who claim to be experts. But in advance it might be worthwhile to mention the formal properties of 'expertise'. First, one must have superior competence in some sphere. This is a conceptual truth. In practice, however, those we label experts do not always have this. Sometimes a charlatan is misidentified; and sometimes individuals, highly knowledgeable within a particular school of thought, are called experts and later that school of thought falls into disrepute within its field, thus making continued title to expertise unwarranted. Second, superior competence is an assessment of one's propositional or procedural knowledge. In some spheres, one's expertise alignes more closely with one than the other. Compare the historian's propositional knowledge with the tennis player's procedural counterpart. In others, there is a relatively even balance as might be so in the case of an archeologist who knows <u>what</u> he is looking for among the ancient ruins and <u>how</u> to dig it up. Third, R.S. Peters[1] distinguishes 'authorities' from 'experts' by saying that the former knows things for their own sake while the latter has instrumental knowledge. Presumably, historians and tennis players would represent these respectively. This dichotomy between intrinsically worthwhile and instrumental knowledge would, perhaps, be more useful if taken as an indication of differing <u>functions</u> to which knowledge can be put than to pick out particular groups of individuals. The former would function, perhaps, to satisfy curiousity or to entertain, and the latter to have functional utility. Otherwise, the historian who is alleged to be an authority as opposed to an expert, and who uses his knowledge to predict the future from the past meets the requirements of an expert. Regarding the dichotomy in terms of function seems to make more sense, and doubly so, given that ordinary language users are generally indiscriminate in labelling individuals as one or the other. Consequently, I will use the terms interchangeably, or to denote function.

(b) Who are the Educational Experts?

In countries such as Finland, Sweden, Norway, France, Belgium, Austria, Spain, Italy, the United States, Canada and Australia curriculum decisions are centralized. In all but Canada, the United States and

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[1] <u>Ethics and Education</u> (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1966), p. 240.

Australia the structures of the macro and micro activities of schooling (for state supported schools) are determined by the central government. In Canada et al local school boards have some say in determining parts of micro activities (e.g. syllabus details) but provincial governments have responsibility for macro decisions. Now the composition of decision-making groups and the procedures they employ vary from country to country, but commonly governments set up or sponsor curriculum groups who draw up guidelines etc. Groups are often small and membership might include academics, teachers, civil servants and perhaps individuals from the wider community. The individuals are presumed to be experts in some sphere relevant to curriculum.

These groups of professional decision-makers are institutionalized. They are, to a considerable extent, intellectually and physically detached from that which they decide about, namely the schools. I will call them institutional experts. They are to be distinguished from other experts whose contact with the schools is more direct such as reading specialists, child psychologists and perhaps even a reformed Schools Council in Britain.

At mention of Britain here, it seems opportune to note the current debates in Britain about state control of the curriculum, since I think that in some respects the issue is one of expert control and competence. It is not entirely this, of course. John White[2] and others have argued that decisions about the structure of curriculum (a macro activity decision) ought to be made at a political level, not so much on grounds of competence, but because democracy is involved. His claim is that the structure of the curriculum, i.e. what disciplines we teach and what we leave out, affects the conceptions children develop of the good life. As the children become adults and take their places in society as decision-makers - in industry and government - their notions of the good life will, through their decisions, influence the emergent good society. Since the shape of the good society is of concern to everyone in society, each should have a say in determining it. Since the state is the democratic representative of citizens the state ought to decide the shape of the good society, hence, the structure of curriculum. Now White's argument has serious flaws which I have tried

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[2]See White's paper 'Teacher Accountability and School Autonomy', Proceedings of the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain, Vol X, July 1976, pp. 58-78; and my reply 'John White on State Control of the Curriculum', Journal of Philosophy of Education, Vol. 12, 1978, pp. 63-8.

to point out elsewhere. Still, the position could be revitalized by different arguments. However, for me to show that the position is completely misguided would involve a very long discussion of tradition, democracy and rights; hence in a thesis on competence we must simply leave it as it is.

There are, however, other arguments that could be used to support state control. For instance, one could say that if the state were to make macro or micro decisions, or both, it could gather together the most expert decision-makers in philosophy, economics, sociology, psychology, curriculum and the disciplines. Experts would make the decisions. Centralization, thus, could lead to optimally competent decision-making. Equally, the level of efficiency in running the nation's schools could be bolstered by the coordination and standardization of plans. For instance, school programmes could be made uniform throughout the country so that, among other things, the children of mobile parents would not suffer as they moved to new schools.

Now there are many similar lines of argument that could be taken but they all seem to hinge on the expertise of state decision-makers. In consequence, apart from the political argument in support of state control, the matter could reasonably be treated as of a piece with the general case dealing with institutional experts. For state decision-makers are typical of institutional experts, and the arguments that I will put against the case for such experts will apply as well to those employed by the state as to those who are independent of it.

(c) Institutional Experts

We might think of institutional experts as a sub-set of the class of experts, insofar as they meet the formal conditions but have characteristics which distinguish them in an empirical way from others. There are, I believe, two features about their <u>modus operandi</u> which set them apart. Typically, institutional experts (a) <u>centralize</u>, and (b) <u>standardize</u> policy making. Since there are usually not enough of them to go around, centralization makes efficient use of a scarce resource (i.e. the experts). And standardization (e.g. prescription of compulsory texts, courses and content) is something which is done to achieve efficiency of policy implementation and it can be justified on the grounds that objectively true and universally applicable theories are available and known (exclusively) by them. Why? Well, because

they are experts, of course. And that is what is usually meant by being an expert.

Why should we be so concerned with only a sub-set of the class? The answer is simply that proponents of the 'experts-should-decide' view use 'expert' not just in the conceptual sense of individuals having knowledge credentials, but in the referring sense, where those picked out by the term are specific social groups - academics, government policy makers, and so on.

Given that our over-riding objective is to recommend one among the usual alternatives as worthy of entitlement to authority for curriculum, it would be pointless for us to deal solely with the conceptual issue. In consequence, by 'experts', I will mean institutional experts as we have just described them. Teachers (as experts) will be dealt with in a separate chapter and non institutional experts such as remedial teachers or clinical workers of some description who are not usually centralized, will simply be treated as a special case, though not a particularly important one since they rarely aspire to more than consultation on curriculum, as opposed to authority for it.

3. Educational Theory

(a) The Problem

If the expert's claim to superior decision-making competence rests on the assumption that he is a party to the theory of education just as an engineer's competence rests on his understanding of up to date engineering theory, we are entitled to ask, what is this educational theory?[3] The likely response to such a query from most educational commentators would be a rather blushing remark about there not actually being a systematic theory at present. What bearing would this have on the position that experts ought to be educational decision-makers? From a practical point of view it would remove the thrust from their claim - the discussion about which we will return to later on - but from the logical standpoint one could still posit that, at least in principle, experts would be most competent. But even that has its problems because strong arguments have been raised by some philosophers against the possibility of there ever being an educational theory in principle. The cogency of this stricture depends, in turn, upon the interpretation

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[3] Clearly, this sort of competence would pertain to decisions about rather than within activities. For educational theories would be relevant to determination of the rules of schooling, not decision-making within the rules once known.

given to 'theory'; for if, by theory, we only mean a set of explanatory generalizations it is not hard to produce several (e.g. common sense notions about human learning and teaching methodology) which might be construed as sufficient for this. But if we have in mind a more rigorous scientific interpretation of theory there may well be a serious problem.

Even if we defend the notion that educational theory is possible, there are further problems. Overlooking the obvious point that, logically possible or not, there may not be any theories yet developed which experts can lay claim to, there is a further, and seemingly odd view, that elaborate education theory is not necessary - hence, neither are experts. Nevertheless, it has some powerful arguments to support it.

My intention is to begin this enormously complex problem by looking at the debate between D.J. O'Connor and P.H. Hirst about the meaning and criteria of an educational theory.[4] The reason for taking this debate so seriously here is that each presents a plausible view of educational theory yet they are views which are in competion with one another. These notions are, I believe, quite representative of the major sphere of debate, at least among philosophers of education. My intention will be to explore some of the possibilities of reconciliation between them and to show some of the weaknesses of each. Then I want to consider some of the arguments that have been appearing in the current literature against (a) the logical possibility of an educational theory, and (b) the desirability of developing one. I will then argue that theoretical knowledge in itself is insufficient for decision-making competence.

(b) The Structure of Educational Theories

(i) The O'Connor-Hirst debate

O'Connor takes the view that if there is to be such a thing as an educational theory, whereby 'theory' one has in mind something which con-

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[4] 'The Nature and Scope of Educational Theory (1) and (2)', an essay by O'Connor and reply by Hirst, in Glenn Langford and D.J. O'Connor eds., New Essays in the Philosophy of Education, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), pp. 47-75. This debate between them is long-standing. It began with O'Connor's book Introduction to the Philosophy of Education, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957), and essays by Hirst: 'Philosophy and Educational Theory', British Journal of Educational Studies, Vol. 12, No. 1, 1963, and 'Educational Theory' in J.W. Tibble ed., The Study of Education, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966).

forms to the normal and proper (scientific) usage of the term, it would be something like the following. First, the object or goal of the theory would be the explanation of, and prediction within, the social institution of education for the control and well being of those within it. Second, such a theory would be made up of appropriate sciences like psychology, sociology, economics, human biology, as well as of non scientific components like religion, political and social ideals, etc. Third, the theory, to qualify as a 'theory', should meet the following four conditions which are characteristic of any scientific theory.

> (i) It should be a logically interconnected set of hypotheses.
>
> (ii) They should be confirmable by observation.
>
> (iii) They should be refutable.
>
> (iv) They should be explanatory, i.e., they should be conclusions of valid inferences from premises which are believed to be true.[5]

And under pressure from Hirst, O'Connor agrees that <u>educational</u> theories would have to be seen as functioning so as to 'guide' educational activities. But 'guide' is ambiguous, O'Connor notes, as between indications of what <u>can</u> be done and what <u>ought</u> to be done. Hirst accepts the latter but O'Connor, the former. To the extent that what can be done determines what ought to be done, O'Connor is willing to say that a theory should determine (guide) ends as well as means.[6]

(ii) <u>Educational theory: the moral dimension and verification</u>

Now Hirst, on the face of it, agrees with the four conditions O'Connor lays out. But they disagree on two issues which are fundamental to the notion of there ever being a rigorous educational <u>theory</u> and seemingly vital, in turn, to the matter of the experts' claim to superior competence.

The first contention is about the place of morals with regard to educational theory. Both agree that moral problems arise in education. But, Hirst, on the one hand, feels that moral guidance should be part of, i.e., included in, an adequate educational theory,[7] whereas, O'Connor, on the other hand, thinks that morals ought to be excluded.[8]

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[5] O'Connor: 'The Nature and Scope of Educational Theory (1)', p. 50.

[6] Ibid., pp. 54-55.

[7] Hirst: 'The Nature and Scope of Educational Theory (2)', pp. 68-71.

[8] Op. cit., p. 55.

Now if we look behind the scenes to see why each believes as he does, we will, at the same time, draw out their second major difference and, perhaps more valuably, some of the major philosophical difficulties with 'theory'.

O'Connor, to start with, sees a practical theory, in this case an educational theory, as procedural, that is, means to ends. No values need be present in the theory, or if they are in the first instance, they can be reduced to statements of fact. The procedures, or means of bringing about educational ends, can be selected on the basis of efficiency, and as for educational ends, they have an evaluative component to be sure, but which can be reduced to matters of fact if we use as evaluative principles those which are accepted by the community. In other words, by observation we determine the evaluative principles relevant to educational ends, then judge on the basis of them. Conceived thus, educational theory would at least come close to its natural scientific counterparts (though O'Connor still thinks that attaching 'theory' to education is very much a courtesy title) insofar as it is verified purely by observation. More troublesome moral problems, whatever they might be, can be dealt with outside the theory. Incorporating them would simply spoil the theory by importing unmanageable logical problems.[9]

Hirst, by contrast, is not compelled to exclude morals by the strict empiricism that binds O'Connor. That is, in O'Connor's theory there can only be propositions that are verifiable by observation; but Hirst is not ultimately committed to verification by observation, hence not to the exclusion of morals - for that reason anyway. Hirst, rather, is willing to accept confirmation rather more broadly. Truth may be assigned on the basis of strong inductive inference, for one thing, and propositions about human behaviour need not depend solely upon observation but could include, as well, the agent's own account of reasons for acting.[10] Now this begs an enormous range of philosophical questions about the credibility of the agent's account, our ability to understand him and much else besides which we will have to by-pass; but it provides the opportunity for saying that Hirst is aware of these difficulties and that he is not, in view of all this, becoming slap-happy about truth criteria. That is, while standing against strict empiricism he is not, at once, supporting subjectivism of any sort. He simply wants to say that truth can be established in more ways than simply through observation.

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[9] Ibid.

[10] Op. cit., p. 69.

This, then, brings us to the inclusion of morals in theory, because part of Hirst's more generous truth criterion is provision for assignment of truth-values to moral propositions. Hirst's claim, though a bit unspecific and unclear, is that the logical connections between fact and values are existent, if not solid. Moral propositions cannot be proved by appeal to fact; nevertheless the logical link is there. Moreover, on his view, progress is being made in establishing fact-value mappings in some areas; and, in any case, the distinction is demonstrably tenuous in many educational matters. In consequence, values are not forced from theory; the question is, then, why should they be present? Hirst's answer to this is really very simple. If theory is to guide practice, then since moral guidance is needed in educational matters, the theory should provide it. What distinguishes his position from O'Connor's is the interpretation given to 'guidance'. O'Connor looks to medicine and engineering where theories are practical, reasonably solid and restricted, insofar as guidance is concerned, to efficient means to ends, and supposes that education should be likewise. To Hirst, this is to make educational theory inadequate for its purposes.

Having said all of this, we can see that what starts as a disagreement about the place of morals within or without of theory soon becomes an issue of verification. Not only is this their problem, but it is a major issue in philosophy of science and social science. So important is the issue that without taking note of it, further talk about educational theory becomes somewhat suspect. Because of this, it behooves us to examine the issue briefly, if for no other reason than to show its complexity. Moreover, by making a few comments about verification we can, perhaps, take up a position in favour of one or the other, and in the process work our way back to the morals issue, since the two are wound up together. In other words, we arrived at the problem of verification from morals, so we will now start with verification and work back to morals.

The first point is that the strict empiricist, as O'Connor seems to be, holds that confirmation of scientific statements has to be by observation, and the starting worry is that 'observation' is a vague term. When we test air temperature with a thermometer are we observing the heat when we see the mercury rise in the same sense that we observe a typewritter we are looking at directly? And when the path of a proton is noted by a trail of vapour in a cloud chamber, is that observation in the same sense as either the testing of air temperature or seeing the typewritter? Strict empiricists differ on what counts as observation. Those who are willing to accept indirect observation can save O'Connor's

condition (ii) from falling to the air temperature counter-example; but does vapour in the cloud chamber count even as indirect observation? Is the vapour trail not simply an inductive inference based upon prior unconfirmed proton theory? In any case, even if we do call it observation, and hence allow the empiricist to relax his standards, how would he account for black holes which emit no light and hence are unobservable in principle? Theories about black holes posited by scientists would have to be regarded as unacceptable: in similar vein much of science - of what scientists do - would have to be ruled out of court. Given the two options, rejecting the empiricist criterion seems more realistic. It is the matter of observation and the empiricists insistence upon it that introduces the difficulty with values in his conception of theory. For, to begin with, observation in the social sciences often presupposes particular explanatory theories about entities which, themselves, cannot be confirmed by observation, the fact of depending upon which, illustrates the theorist's evaluative bias in favour of those theories. For example, the development of a practical psychological theory about regulating particular behaviours, which is based on a theory of operant conditioning, may or may not itself be confirmable by observation, but the theory on which it rests in this case cannot be verified as bullet-proof by observation simply because no amount of observed regularity of behaviour will force us to accept the causal connection between rewards and repeated action, to the exclusion of, say, Freudian theories to the contrary. The same goes for a wide range of psychological, economic and sociological theories. And then on top of this, the fact that the social scientist builds upon these prior theories shows that he prefers these theories to those in competition which indicates an evaluative bias which he, the empiricist, claims not to have.[11]

A second point, closely related to this, is that any natural or social scientist, empiricist or other, pledges allegiance to values such as rigour, simplicity, elegance, and so forth; indeed they are part of the construction of theory. It seems plausible as well to suppose that

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[11] In a similar vein Brian Fay argues in Social Theory and Political Practice, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1975) Chapter 3 that strict empiricists (or positivists as he calls them) characteristically treat social rules and institutions, which in particular cases are not immutable, as entities with a life of their own, upon which social theory is developed. In consequence, these rules and institutions are reified and reinforced. Because the empiricist needs these rules etc., as a basis for observation, he develops an ideology which is founded upon these rules. Thus he generates a conservative bias in his construction of social theory and subsequently recommended political practice.

commitment to certain personal or professional values such as integrity and abhorence of falsehood, confusion and muddle would apply to the strict empiricist as much as anyone.

Third, Hirst makes fleeting note of O'Connor's suggestion that, on the means-ends model, ends can be those which are desired by the community, and means those which are most efficient.[12] But is the educational theorist here not to morally assess those ends, even if only to rule out or refuse to participate in bringing about ends which are immoral in his mind (e.g., indoctrination or some state of anti-rationalism)?[13] And is 'efficiency' to be interpreted as minimizing time spent, resources used, cash cost, human suffering or what? Is not value placed on that which one chooses?

Fourth, and another point also mentioned by Hirst, is that means are sometimes themselves ends of action which leaves them open to moral evaluation.[14] Is corporal punishment, for example, an acceptable way of bringing about behaviour reform in schools? The whole idea of education and educational institutions - what they are and how they are to carry out their function - whether we accept a means-ends model or not, reflects a range of values held by decision-makers about the world, institutions and the treatment of human beings (i.e., respect for persons' rights, duties, freedoms and so forth).

Looked at in this way, it becomes very difficult to separate the inherent value-ladeness of theoretical statements and moral directives made by the theory. Although the former is covert and the latter overt, they come, in the end, to much the same thing. In consequence, it leaves us wondering about the coherence of O'Connor's position. Still, he could admit that even the empiricist's theory is value-laden without being committed to adding further value prescriptions in the abundance that Hirst would like to see. Hirst, remember, envisions an educational theory that guides practice in much more than technical matters - in morals as well.

O'Connor wants morals outside of theory to protect the latter from grave logical difficulties. Hirst does not see the difficulties as grave, and believes that without morals the theory would be inadequate. Their positions would be potentially reconcilable if both were ethical definists because such a view reduces judgments about moral right and

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[12] O'Connor, op. cit., p. 55.

[13] Hirst makes a reply along these lines, op. cit., p. 71.

[14] Ibid.

wrong to reportive definitions (e.g., 'right' means 'desired upon reflection' or 'desired when looked at from an impersonal point of view') which enables moral decisions to be judged in accordance with the definitions by empirical means. For example, the question 'Is it right to corporally punish this child?' would be answered by determining empirically whether the person asking it, to use one definition, actually 'desired to do it upon reflection'.

Given O'Connor's emphasis of the logical difficulties of deriving values from facts, it seems unlikely that he would support this view, even though a strict empiricist might be tempted to do so. And Hirst, in acknowledging the face-value difficulties, seems to be implicitly against this view. Doubtless for the best because definism is open to devastating criticisms. Its downfall is that it endeavours to reduce ethical matters to factual propositions, namely definitions and the compatibility of 'ethical' judgments with them. But factual propositions do not favour, recommend or prescribe actions as ethical propositions do. For example, if we query the moral goodness of corporally punishing a child on some occasion, and to do this we ask if, say, this punishment was 'desired upon reflection', we have established a matter of fact, not a moral recommendation. Now the definist might reply that the definition of good, say, 'desired upon reflection', is implicitly an ethical principle recommending action on the basis of reflective desires. The problem is though, as Frankena clearly points out, the definition is needed to support the principle; and the principle is needed to support the definition. Since, obviously, they cannot support each other, the problem of justification of the definist's definition remains unsolved.[15]

Consequently, there does not seem to be any way of drawing values into an educational theory that would satisfy both O'Connor and Hirst. We are therefore returned to the starting point: a theory without messy moral directives or one that includes them.

Choosing between them is made difficult because the principles used to justify the respective positions are not themselves easy to rank in importance. Hirst justifies the inclusion of morals on grounds of the adequacy of the theory to perform its function. O'Connor would counter this by saying, first, that a rigorous theory is important and the inclusion of morals militates against this. Second, to his way of thinking, a practical theory need not perform so great a function (namely guidance),

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[15] W. K. Frankena, Ethics (2nd ed.), (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973), p. 100.

hence without morals it would be adequate. Resolution of the issue would then seem to focus on the function of an educational theory. This issue, however, is much too complex to deal with here; especially since our main concern has been to highlight two major contrasting views of educational theory so as to give a circumspect analysis, all with an eye toward asking whether an educational theory is possible in principle. We are left, therefore, at the interim position of having to choose a side.

However, as a parting note: to my way of thinking, Hirst's position is preferable. For educational decision-making is shot through with moral issues which somehow must be dealt with by our moral principles, flimsy or not. In other words, we need guidance in the larger sense. To keep the moral component on the outside just to keep the theory, as it were, respectable, seems pointless. Proclamations of strict empiricists notwithstanding, social science theories, as we shall soon see, are not as rigorous as those in natural sciences, so not much contamination is caused by the inclusion of morals.

(c) Attacks Against the Logical Possibility of Educational Theory

(i) Mounce's two objections

Even if we take Hirst's side, as against the more rigorously scientific position of those like O'Connor, the way is not now clear of obstacles to claiming the possibility of an educational theory. One of the recent commentators on the O'Connor-Hirst debate, Howard Mounce, poses a number of problems for theories of social science in general.[16] I want to look at two of these.

Mounce's attack on the notion of an educational theory centres on the impossibility of developing a systematic body of theory, something which would satisfy O'Connor's condition that a theory must be a logically inter-connected set of hypotheses. His two principal misgivings are (a) theories about human beings are impossible (other than as vague generalizations) because of the unpredictability of human actions, and (b) systematic theories are impossible because of the complexity and diversity of human motives and influences on them - an extension of his point about them being unpredictable.

To develop his first point: he believes, as do many philosophers of social science, that human behaviour is unpredictable largely because

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16 'Theory and Practice' in Proceedings of the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain (Vol. X, 1976), pp. 114-123.

we are out of the natural order of causation to which material things are subject, insofar as we are able to act as we choose rather than in ways which are determined causally by our 'nature'. Many social scientists have endeavoured to explain and predict human behaviour by trying to understand man's motives (both conscious and unconscious) for action hoping to generalize from them. Now, understanding another man's motives has always been contentious in philosophical debate because if one takes (one version of) the empiricist - scientific means of understanding, one must propound and confirm theory by observation only. But in fact, this is not how we understand human motives, according to Mounce. The social scientist's understanding of his subject is, at least in part, based on what he, the scientist, shares with the subject, namely a conceptual understanding of the circumstances in which one is motivated to act, and of course the same sorts of inclinations and beliefs about what one ought (morally and otherwise) to do in such and such a situation, and so on. In other words, the social scientist makes predictions about what the subject will do - what his motives are - on the basis of shared beliefs and understandings. But, the problem which Mounce says Peter Winch has raised,[17] is that correctly assessing the subject's motives would depend upon having the same knowledge and understanding, i.e., beliefs about the world and beliefs about the specific circumstances in which the motivation arises, as the subject did at that moment. Well, this certainly cannot be guaranteed between social scientists and their subjects. For surely the anthropologist, for example, cannot lay claim to the same conceptual scheme as his primitive subject any more than the historian can pare away his knowledge of some historical character's future so as to understand - to have identical thoughts and feelings - as that historical character. If the social scientist cannot understand exactly what the motive is, or was, he can hardly generalize about it. And it follows on the heels of this, of course, that hopes are dashed for a system of social theory.

Mounce's second, and very powerful objection to social theory, is that motives are too complex to be stated precisely. There are an indefinite number of contingent factors which may have a bearing on judgments. A misbehaving child, for example, could be acting from deep-seated frustrations with his home life, the school or social life or acting on a dare from his friends in class or attempting to impress them with his courage or, indeed, any number of other things. If asked for his motives,

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[17] See his influential book The Idea of a Social Science (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958).

would the child understand them fully or be able to articulate them? Social behaviour, it is alleged, is simply too complex to be completely explained by a theory.

What reply can be given to Mounce on these two points? On the issue of understanding someone else's motives, his first point, it is sometimes suggested that, at least in theory, we could use our imaginations. That is, we could put ourselves in the actor's position and think what motives and contingent circumstances would influence our behaviour. The problem with this of course is that we would have to know what the actor's motive actually was in order to assess whether or not we have imagined correctly. For example, suppose in constructing a theory of reading competence among beginners one task would be to determine the linkage between the child's concept of reading - understanding of its nature, purpose, rules and use of the rules (strategies) - how he reads. We could gain much by asking the child, of course, but understanding might depend upon our ability to put ourselves in his conceptual shoes. So we would imagine ourselves as children deciding upon a strategy to employ, e.g., read letter-by-letter, clusters of letters, word-by-word, and so on, and endeavour to make the connection with our notion of what reading is. Now suppose, imagining ourselves as beginning readers, we were able to do this. How, it could legitimately be asked, do we know that we imagined correctly? Some sort of criterion for success would be necessary; but that is precisely what we do not have. Indeed one would have to imagine it; hence the same problem once again. In consequence, if we accept Mounce's (and Winch's) view that social science theory depends upon understanding human motives, and that to have such an understanding requires that we share the conceptual foundations with, and have the identical experiences to, our subjects, it follows that, since we cannot, we are thereby unable to construct with complete accuracy theories about human behaviour.

The complexity issue raised by Mounce is, equally, troublesome. But a possible response could be worked up from a point made by A.J. Ayer.[18] To Mounce's assertion that reasons and other contingencies about human action are indefinitely numerous and complex, something which differentiates the social sciences from the natural sciences and which militates against the possibility of an accurate theory in the former, we might state Ayer's claim that there is no difference in principle between social and natural sciences in this regard. For it is possible,

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[18] 'Man as a Subject for Science' in P. Laslett and W.G. Runciman, eds., Philosophy, Politics and Society, Third series (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1969), pp. 6-24.

again in principle, to allow for a list with an indefinite number of places on it to account for every possible variable. In other words, just as in the natural sciences, it is possible in principle in the social sciences, to account for the contingencies. The list may be much longer in the social sciences, but that alone does not make them different in principle than the natural sciences. For example, development of a reading theory would have to contend not only with specifics about the child's concept of reading but with motivation, state of readiness, prior learning, eyesight, and much else besides. Although these factors may be numerous and complicate theorizing, they can be dealt with in the same way that are contingencies in physics or biology.

I think a reply to Mounce along these lines is adequate, and why this is so will be explained shortly. But for the moment I would like to take a liberty with Mounce, and those who would support him, and present what I think he (or they) would argue in rebuttal. They could say that at some stage in propounding a theory we must settle on a finite listing, otherwise we would not have a final version of the theory. But, once we have done this, the theory is open to a charge of incompleteness. This is because reality is so complex that there always remains the possibility of an unaccounted-for item coming to our attention, thus rendering our list, and hence the theory, incomplete. If we revised our theory in light of it, another could appear; our list would never be complete, hence neither would our theory.

The reason why this counter-argument does not work is the reason why the whole complexity issue does not devastate the notion of a social science theory. First, complexity is not exclusive to social behaviour; it exists in nature as well. Granted, theories of social action must contend with significant differences among (human) subjects (e.g., mental and physical capacities and competences), their widely ranging motives and the very fact that motives sometimes change when subjects become aware of predictions about themselves (cf., a student who begins to work hard when failure is predicted by his teacher). But nature is not always or necessarily uniform. Higher primates, chimpanzees and dolphins, for example, may well be said to have motives, individuality and vary in competence. This, if only a plausible hypothesis amoung biologists and philosophers of science, seems intuitively obvious to many domestic pet owners! What is more, the contingencies of time, place and experimental conditions when testing theories are matters which even the physicist or chemist must contend with.[19] Think

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[19]Karl Popper makes this point in The Poverty of Historicism (1957)

of a chemistry experiment: there is always some degree of impurity in the chemicals (perhaps from exposure to the air or residue from the container in which they are stored, measured or mixed); measurement can only be as accurate as the instruments used and the chemist who (using his 'fallible' senses) reads them; and the chemical reactions themselves are to some extent affected by such things as atmospheric conditions which can never be identical to similar experiments or completely eliminated (given the imperfections of containers or the instruments used to detect minute quantities of leakage). Put simply, experimental conditions are never identical or separate occasions, whether in natural or social sciences. In this respect at least, therefore, they do not differ, in principle.

Second, complexity, or the problem of completeness that it leads to, fails as an argument against theory because it would be an unreasonable expectation of all theories, even in the natural sciences, to be complete. For, if by complete, we meant that a theory would have to explain absolutely everything about some phenomenon, we would run headlong into the logical impossibility of answering every why-question about the phenomenon because there would always be the logical possibility of why-questions as yet unasked or unthought of. For example, think of something in the realm of nature such as a flower. There could be an infinite number of descriptions of the flower. Science, which endeavours to describe and explain nature, could never achieve its purpose if completeness were a necessary condition. To be systematic and adequate does not require an accounting of every complexity. In consequence, Mounce's complexity argument against social science must be rejected.

To be considered next is the first point attributed to Mounce, namely the inability of the social scientist to predict human behaviour, in large measure because we cannot, logically, get inside the head of the subject at the time he acts to see what his motives are. There are, really, two questions here. Can human behaviour be predicted? Can we understand as the subject understood?

The answer to the first question is yes. Insofar as social behaviour is rule-governed or habitual, we need only learn the rules and

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(London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961), pp. 93-97. This, however, is not true in all cases. In celestial mechanics mass, velocity and distance interact with one another and are the only variables. This applies as well with nonatomic thermodynamics in which only volume, temperature, pressure and a few other variables of this sort interact. On this see May Brodbeck: 'Logic and Scientific Method in Research on Teaching' in N.L. Gage ed., Handbook of Research on Teaching (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1963), pp. 44-93.

habits which govern behaviour and we can make predictions. Motorists will stop at red lights, cricketers will wear white on the pitch at Lords and a particular friend of mine, if invited for dinner at eight, will arrive not a second late. And, how do we learn these rules and habits? Observed regularities and questions asked of the agent about motives and hypotheses which seem to best explain the facts. Now, to be sure, generalizations about such behaviour are not certainties, nor could they be. But are we any more able to predict animal behaviour in zoology? Will every single rat in the universe push the lever for food when in the Skinner box after the same number of rewards? Will every wolf attack the lamb? Will your dog come when called each and every time? The likely answer to these questions is no because other factors sometimes intervene. Animals, for example, may become distracted or lack physical or cognitive capacities to behave as predicted. The problem seemingly is ameliorated by postulating standard conditions under which behaviour will be uniform. But listing the items can be problematic as an indefinite number of unthought of or unprecedented possibilities may arise to force greater refinement of the theory. Indeed this would be true in other branches of natural science. In biology, for example, it is possible to theorize about plant growth 'under standard conditions' but this phrase is a possible catch-all for anything that confounds the predicted behaviour. For much of natural science then, how is there a difference from social science with regard to certainty? The mistake is to suppose that science theory expects certainly. For to have this certainty we would have to have solved the problem of complexity which, clearly, we cannot.

The second question asks about a particular means of understanding and explaining human behaviour which is sometimes known as <u>empathy</u>. That is, in virtue of having the same conceptual scheme and common experiences as the subject, we put ourselves in his shoes - we try to understand what he must have been thinking and feeling at the time. Mounce claims this is impossible in all cases because the social scientist might not have the same conceptual scheme or have shared the same experiences. And, to be added, is the point we made about not having a criterion to be used in telling whether or not we were understanding exactly as our subject did (i.e. actually empathizing).

There are two points to be made. First, as we have seen, this is simply not the <u>only</u> way of understanding and explaining human action. Hence, to argue successfully against it (as Mounce does) is not to argue that social understanding is impossible. Second, to suppose that it is

essential to understand as the subject understood in order to produce an adequate scientific explanation is to make a fundamental mistake about the purpose of science. That is, to put oneself in the subject's shoes may be an effective technique for acquiring understanding, but it is wrong to think that the outcome of a scientific theory must be postulates that actually make those who understand them experience what the subject did. It is not the business of scientific theory to recreate reality. To have successfully described and explained the alienation of Indian children in white urban classrooms is not to have produced statements that invoke in the reader or hearer the feelings or thoughts of those children. Empathy might help as describe and explain, but the end product is not to be empathy. If Mounce's position implies this, he is mistaken. For this would be to make unrealistic demands on science. And it would confuse a description and explanation with what is being described and explained. To quote Richard Rudner on this:

> The alleged failure of social science to 'capture' (i.e. to reproduce or to be the psychological equivalent of) the delightful chortle of a baby in social play with its parent, the anguished embarrassment of an adolescent, the nuances of social interaction of a board of directors meeting or a cocktail party, is too often nothing but the failure to distinguish statements and the systematizing uses to which they can be put, from the social phenomena referred to by those statements.[20]

(ii) Conclusion

If social science theory is impossible in principle, it has not been demonstrated so far. Nevertheless, there are two lessons arising from our discussion over and above the problem of the meaning of theory. First, even if educational theories are possible and we had access to them, they would not ensure absolute and unassailable certainty. Second, the reason why certainty is impossible and, perhaps also, the reason why we encounter such difficulty in generating educational theory is, as Mounce is quite right in pointing out, the enormous complexity of factors which influence human decision-making and action.

4. Is Educational Theory Important?[21]

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[20] Philosophy of Social Science (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-hall, 1966), pp. 69-70.

[21] An abbreviated version of this and the section that follows is published in The Journal of Educational Thought under the title 'Experts and Control of the Curriculum', Vol. 13, no. 2, August, 1979, pp. 129-39.

(a) Against the Need for a Theory

Even if we presume that educational theories are possible in principle and overlook the difficulties of actually producing a satisfactory theory of education and of finding genuine experts in it, there remains a problem to which both D.J. O'Connor[22] and D.I. Lloyd[23] have pointed. They claim that a sophisticated theory, one in the context of which it would be appropriate to speak of experts, is simply not needed in education - certainly not as in medicine or engineering. Both make similar claims.

First, they contend that there have been many successful curriculum decisions which have not been preceded by developments in educational theory. Teaching and learning, they claim, have gone on throughout the ages apparently without teachers giving too much thought to the underlying concerns of their art; and before any significant theoretical activities in education were begun.[24] O'Connor points out that this is quite in contrast with medicine or engineering. Development in both, and the logical possibility of it, was a consequence of progress in the natural sciences. In education, he says the theoretical investigations - largely a product of recent years - did not precede practice but, rather, followed the enormous increase in the number of schools, teachers and students in this century.[25] Clearly, on this view, theoretical endeavours are just frills to the practices of schooling.

Second, it is claimed that social scientific (educational) theory is too recondite for practical needs. O'Connor draws a parallel between teaching and cooking, the point being that one no more needs to understand the complex psychological processes (etc.) in children in order to teach well or make practical decisions about it, than one needs to know the chemical reactions among combined ingredients in cooking.[26]

Lloyd stresses the familiar view that common sense about human behaviour and personal associations, born of one's life-long observations and common conceptual scheme, is sufficient to enable one to make judgments about educational activities without having to call upon theories spun out by social scientists. What is needed, he thinks, is

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[22] O'Connor, op. cit.

[23] D.I. Lloyd, 'Theory and Practice' in Proceedings of the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain, Vol. X, (1976), pp. 98-113.

[24] Ibid., p. 101.

[25] O'Connor, op. cit., pp. 60, 62.

[26] Ibid., p. 64.

'reflection'. By that he means thinking about past situations - recalling the details, noting similarities and dissimilarities and considering the ethical dimension - all of which are done in an attempt to sort out what was done from what might have been done bearing in mind all of the relevant practical and ethical considerations. From this, presumably, one benefits the next time similar circumstances occur. One's reflections can be called upon for guidance in avoiding past mistakes and to suggest new avenues. The principal distinguishing feature between this and theorizing is that a rigidly set pattern for future action in similar circumstances has <u>not</u> been set as would be the case in adopting a theory. Rather, the essential items for making up new plans when the occasion arises have been generated.[27] Through reflection of this sort, flexibility can be maintained.

(b) In Support of Theory

On the first of these two points, it may be argued, as Hirst[28] does, that the practical activities of teaching done so successfully in the past, may not have been done in any <u>reasoned</u> way. Success, that is, may have been contingent upon favourable circumstances, e.g. unusually bright students, happy accidents on the part of the teacher in choosing certain techniques or materials, etc. In other words, curriculum decision-makers and teachers may not have had reasons for their actions, or even been aware of the importance of having reasons.

As to O'Connor's remark that educational theory has followed, not preceded educational practice (unlike medicine and engineering), one might point out that even in the allegedly more recondite fields of medicine and engineering some form of primitive practice existed (logically and practically) prior to theoretical advances in the sciences.[29] Education may indeed be awaiting its Newton!

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[27]Joseph Schwab in 'The Practical: Arts of Eclectic', <u>School Review</u>, 79 (1971), pp. 493-543 proposes, as well, a practical rather than theoretical approach to curriculum. His concern is largely to show the eclectic nature of practical decisions and the importances of contributions from a wide range of disciplines. I am very much in agreement with Israel Scheffler who applauds the central idea of diversified approached to curriculum but finds fault with the understanding of theory in relation to practice. Much of Scheffler's commendation and criticism of Schwab is similar to mine of Lloyd. See Scheffler's 'The Practical as a Focus for Curriculum', <u>Reason and Teaching</u> (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), pp. 181-97.

[28]Hirst, op. cit., p. 73.

[29]Hirst also makes this point on p. 73.

There is a certain seductiveness about the second O'Connor-Lloyd claim. For it seems plausible to suppose that teaching and cooking share the mundane quality of being more in need of technique than theory, save perhaps in certain troubled areas such as special education. Add to that Lloyd's notion of 'reflection' - recollection of past practice, common-sense and flexibility in future dealings - and the case looks quite reasonable indeed.

I would not want to say that such a view is anti-intellectualist - indeed it is probably conceived as being a realistic admonishment to those who would over-intellectualise. But it certainly is needlessly pessimistic and lacking in foresight. It is an attitude no doubt similar to that taken in the past to a great host of practical human activities which have at one stage been moribound and later transformed by developments in the natural and social sciences. Open heart surgery, space exploration and psychoanalysis would be examples. The O'Connor-Lloyd position, it seems to me, is typical of that held by skeptics in the early days of any theoretical venture. In this case its blindness is to the enormous potential, or so the optimist would allege, of psychology, sociology and philosophy.

There is, too, an objection which can be raised to Lloyd's concept of reflection. The thrust of his programme is antithetical to <u>theoriz-ing</u>. But he has not, I am convinced, presented us with an alternative. Instead of doing away with theorizing and its application to practice he has simply redescribed the act of theorizing and given it a different label.

Bearing in mind the account given earlier of a 'theory' (i.e. a theory is (i) a logically interconnected set of hypotheses, (ii) confirmable by observation, etc., (iii) refutable, (iv) explanatory), consider this example of what I take Lloyd to mean by a typical case of reflection. A classroom teacher, mentally reviewing his last term experiences with a disruptive child, decides that his approach has been wrong. The child is known to be neglected and mistreated by his parents, and not particularly well liked by his fellow students; so it has been supposed that the child's disruptiveness has been an attempt, at once, to rebel and to draw attention. Gentle and loving treatment by the teacher to remove the sense of neglect and the motive for rebellion has been the teacher's reason for various things done in the classroom towards this end, e.g. extra personal attention and appointment to positions of responsibility in class, such as monitor. The teacher's reflective assessment is that this has failed; that the child has seen these kindnesses as signs of weakness and taken advantage. It is now felt by the

teacher that much firmer, yet scrupulously fair, treatment would at least contain the misbehaviour.

This piece of reflection, I contend, is simply a layman's contribution to educational theory. It has all the ingredients. The conclusion is, in some sense, a guide to a certain range of classroom actions. The hypothesis about human behaviour in respect of a child's reactions to loose and tight discipline would presumably be consistent and compatible with other theories and beliefs (e.g. about learning, motivation and ethics) in an interconnected network comprising what could be construed as the teacher's own theory of education [condition (i)]. The teacher evidently rejected the earlier hypothesis on the basis of observations about its lack of success, so presumably the present hypothesis could be rejected if it proves unsuccessful, or kept if it works. The hypothesis, therefore, can be confirmed by observation (etc.) and is refutable [conditions (ii) and (iii)]. Finally, the hypothesis when added to other beliefs explains this sort of behaviour [condition (iv)]. In short, what constitutes the theorizing, constitutes Lloyd's reflection.

The second flaw in Lloyd's invective against application of theory is in supposing that the correct application of theory necessarily forces the details of the situation to which it is being applied into the mould of the standard conditions, or assumed circumstances, when the theory was constructed. Granted, some details must be forced. Since no two situations are ever exactly alike any application of a theory would have to accommodate some difference of detail. What is important though (and I am sure Lloyd would agree with this) is the extent to which situations differ. If significantly, then of course the theory cannot be applied - at least not in the given form. Perhaps when called for, the theory, or the plans and policies developed from it, could be amended. If not that, then dropped altogether. A behaviourist token-reward system, for example, might be amended in respect of its reward system or eliminated entirely if unsuccessful. Flexibility can be maintained; indeed must be! Lloyd's criticism of inflexibility seems to be a rather better objection to unwise applications of theory than to applications per se.

Now one could go on to claim that if all rational curriculum decision-making involves at least the assumption of theories, if not the construction of theory itself, then conceivably expertise, qua the rigorous and erudite investigations of institutional experts, is desirable. I would oppose this. It is not that I am in the least antagonistic

towards theoretical examination of curriculum matters; quite the contrary. It is, however, something to do with the class of individuals we are calling institutional experts which makes me think they are not particularly desirable decision-makers in the practical spheres of curriculum.

5. Experts and Educational Decisions

Why, then, should institutional experts not be the decision-makers? The reason is not that theory is redundant to curriculum decisions as O'Connor and Lloyd believe. Nor is it because an educational theory is impossible in principle or practice. Rather, despite the desirable level of rigour and erudition that experts bring to theory construction, institutional experts, and I stress the adjective 'institutional', are unable to satisfy the condition of adequate access to data with two consequences (a) they are not always able to ascertain the compatibility of contextual details to the activity and (b) they are either unable, or do not incline, to ensure the consistency of programme and procedure, and, items in each.

The 'adequate access to data' condition is, of course, a pragmatic requisite of the knowledge condition. So, an inability to satisfy the former results in an inability to satisfy the latter. Now the particular difficulties that arise in regard to access must be worked out, but before, I would like to mention the remaining condition of competency - the 'abilities condition'.

(a) The Abilities Condition of Competence

Cognitive and affective abilities required for drawing conclusions and sticking to decisions even under pressure are, to be sure, attributes that some adults have in greater measure than others. But in looking at large social groups (of adults) such as parents, teachers and institutional experts, there appears to be no reason to suppose that the latter are in any way incompetent or inferior to either of the former. Indeed, insofar as the career of an educational expert entails an considerable amount of decision-making, one would think that such abilities would not only develop, but would be prerequisite for, the occupation (unlike, say, parenthood). Whether affective abilities would lag behind their cognitive counterparts for any reason would be a matter of pure conjecture.

(b) Knowledge and Adequate Access

Two problems arise: the first has to do with the concept of expert and the second with those we label institutional experts. The first can be answered satisfactorily; the second cannot.

(i) Experts and knowledge

First, experts who make decisions, qua experts, require a theoretical backing, a body of knowledge from which alternatives and justifications can be drawn. Unfortunately, there is no full-blown educational theory at present, even if we assume it is possible; and in areas where some pieces of theory do exist, there are often competing and irreconcible claims. Freudians and behaviourists, for example, can both account for a lack of success in teaching straight forward propositions. However, their accounts are not only at odds, but as irreconcilably so as is the political anarchist with the communist.

The problem is, of course, not with the notion that an expert is someone with superior knowledge, but with agreement on what counts as 'superior knowledge'. The Freudian may agree that the behaviourist is an expert 'but within the wrong school of thought!'. Given this sectarian feuding, one might feel that 'experts-as-curriculum-decision-makers' presumes a level of agreement which is highly unlikely. To make things worse, if all manner of curriculum decisions are to be given up to bodies of experts; and if what is to be decided has to be an amalgam of interdisciplinary opinion, e.g. as amoung the psychologists, sociologists and philosophers; then values, conceptual schemes and theoretical orientations may not be shared - a situation which belies harmonious decision-making further still.

Can this objection be answered? In part it depicts a scenario at odds with the ideal in three ways: (a) there is no complete theory (b) we do not know which theory is correct where we do have theories (c) considerable disharmony among various contributing fields is presumed. This is, perhaps, overly pessimistic. In some parts of the world, most notably those where Marxism is strongest, the circumstances for expert decision-making are better on all three counts - though this is not necessarily desirable from the point of view of those who decry the theory (Marxism). The point is, powerful (though admittedly not all-pervasive) theories exist, where consensus about their truth, and co-operation from related disciplines is, or seems to be, apparent to some extent. So, a more optimistic picture for the possibility of expert decision-making is conceivable.

Added to this must be the observation that if theories provide the epistemic backing for decision-making, and their paucity rules out experts, then does it not also rule out all other decision-makers? Even if it deflates the case for experts, and it surely does to some degree, we are not, however, forced to suppose that it sinks them. Erudite, though ecclectic, competencies can often promote decision-making through increasing the range of alternatives to be considered. Justifications may be far more difficult, but compromise is not impossible. In sum, if sectarian feuding is to count as a devastating objection to experts, it must with other decision-makers as well.

(ii) Experts: centrality and standardization

Second, and more compelling, is the argument that the social group who aspires to control curriculum, who we have labelled institutional experts, are unsatisfactory, not because they are experts as such but because of certain defining empirical characteristics.

To start, a reminder of some conceptual apparatus developed earlier. First, a practical decision is a choice among alternatives based on a justifying principle. And, a full account of an alternative includes (a) a theoretical description of the action proposed (b) consideration of the usual consequences of implementing such a proposal (c) projection of the consequences likely to occur in the particular case at hand. (b) and (c) are called pragmatic outcomes. Second, curriculum decisions either take place within activities or are about the activities themselves. Every activity has a structure: it has a programme and it has procedures. The components within each of these structural categories must be consistent with one another. That is, within the programme the principles must be consistent with the description, and within the procedures the various formal and informal rules must be consistent with one another. Equally, within an activity the structural categories, and the components within each, must be consistent. The various rules of procedure, that is, must be consistent with the description and principle of the activity as stated in the programme. Clearly, and this is very important to note, any piecemeal decision-making about either programme or procedures in an activity must take into account the other components in order to preserve internal consistency. An additional fact about activities and decisions is that they take place within a context - a context that has two dimensions - namely conceptual and material. The former concerns the sharing of concepts of participants in a particular activity and the relation between those concepts and the concepts necessary to understand the activity; and the latter

deals with the economic, social, political, environmental, etc. conditions in which a particular activity takes place, and those in relation to the condition which are necessary for such activities. Now there are two important points to note. First, when we say that certain conceptual and material conditions must prevail for an activity to take place we mean that those conditions must be compatible with the occurrence of such an activity. Second, elements of context, both conceptual and material, and be different in varying locations and in any location it can shift over time. We have referred to these as conceptual plurality and conceptual dynamism, respectively. The obvious point about decision-making here is that whenever there is to be a change or amendment made to an activity or whenever there is a question about whether or not the activity should take place on a given occasion or in a given place, the question of contextual compatibility will be central.

Bearing these points in mind, the problem I have with expert decision-making is that I doubt their ability to maintain internal consistency when making piecemeal decisions about and within activities of education, and I doubt their ability to discern compatibility between context and activity. Their failure, therefore, will be to maintain the unity of the macro activity. This I want to attribute to an inability to satisfy one of the conditions of competence, namely 'access to data'. And I think they will not satisfy this because of the two features I described sometime ago as being characteristic of <u>institutional</u> experts, namely, the tendencies to centralize decision-making and to standardize plans.

<u>Centralization</u> of decision-making may have many advantages, such as gathering together highly competent individuals who can be provided with the stimulus, time, and research facilities to look more deeply into school problems than would otherwise be possible. But if adequate consideration of alternatives is dependent upon anticipated consequences, both standard and particular outcomes, one wonders just how well the centralized decision-maker will fare in gleaning contextual details. Probable consequences can be predicted to some extent in the light of generalizations from the social sciences and upon past experience with similar situations. But this really only provides information about usual or standard consequences, and this is often not enough. There must be some way of ascertaining the likely outcomes in the particular case at hand. This of course rests upon familiarity with the conceptual and material contexts. Simple physical detachment can make this difficult even when contexts are homogeneous and stable. But in recent

years with the encouragement given to social, ethnic and religious minorities, changing material conditions from redistribution of wealth, population movements and decline, and increases in the quality and quantity of teachers and general educational resources, and the additional fact that education is now available to so much wider a clientele than in past generations, details of local contexts seem more important to decision-making and yet less available to the centralized decision-maker, now than ever before. In Britain one need only consider the effects of the enormous immigrations from Commonwealth countries during the 1960's on the social complexion of cities like Manchester to see part of the point. In a country as inordinately diverse as Canada the matter is compounded many-fold. To put it more succinctly, ours is a generation of shift and plurality in both conceptual and material context. These are details often requiring first-hand observation. So each step that the centralized education expert takes away from direct view of the local context, the less likely he is to gather the information necessary to assessing the consequences of alternatives and hence to making competent decisions. This situation worsens as the expert becomes increasingly centralized and as the two contexts become more and more diverse.

Now, of course one must be fair here to educational theory. Even from a central vantage point a good deal can be said about, for example, human learning, which deals with the logical structure of learning and hence does not depend upon local contingencies. Much of the work of Piaget, Kohlberg, Bruner and, perhaps, Skinner, would seem to fall within this category. But insofar as a complete educational theory must guide practice there are difficulties even with this. For even if we agree that, say, children must pass through an invariant sequence of psychological stages to reach maturity, there is still the matter of how to bring this about which does depend upon other factors such as motivation, available stimuli, and so on, which are contingent upon conceptual and material contexts.

The problem of centrality, it should now be clear, is that whatever is decided about an activity - whatever changes are made to its structure or whatever is to happen within the existent structure - the context must be compatible. However, it is not at all obvious that the institutional expert, in virtue of being centralized, will be able to determine with accuracy, the details of context. Hence compatibility cannot be assured.

With <u>standardization</u> the problem is not the inability to gain access to contextual data, for by this stage in decision-making,

assumptions about standard conditions, or conjectures about local variations, have already been made. The difficulty is now that practical decisions, such as those to do with compulsory curricula, prescribed lesson content, standard textbooks and appropriate teaching methods, will be rigid and fixed.[30] In consequence, if there is on the one hand, significant contextual plurality (either conceptual or material) among the different schools to which these standardized policies apply, then even with flexible applications, they may be inadequate. Equally, if over time contexts shift, there is the same result.

And, on the other hand, if the decision is intended as a change to the structure, that is the programme or procedures of the macro activity or any of the micro activities, an even worse situation arises. For there is not simply one single type of schooling (i.e. macro activity) with a standard set of micro activities comprising it. There are many types of schooling, or versions of a single type. Consequently, if the decision-maker treats all schools as if they have the same structure and makes a uniform change, there is no guarantee that such a change will be <u>consistent</u> with the structure of any of the macro activities other than those used as a model by the decision-maker. For example, if the decision-maker insisted that all schools should adopt a course in sex-education there may well be schools against whose principles this runs. In such cases, this standardized decision would bring an element of internal inconsistency to the school's programme.

In short, standardized policy decisions are applicable only to a roughly homogeneous population. So if it is true that institutional experts usually standardize policies and other decisions, and if it is true that there is not contextual homogeneity, it is doubtful that institutional experts should control the curriculum.

6. <u>Conclusion</u>

Combined, I think centralization and standardization badly wound the case for institutional experts. The medical analogy here does not

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[30]Perhaps this is true, not because details of local context are unavailable, but because 'policy' making often has a <u>political</u> element, which forces changes for non educational reasons, sometimes resulting in standardizations that were not originally intended. By that I mean policies often must be approved and ratified by various administrative and representative bodies. Unlike the creation of a theory and extrapolation of practical offshoots, policies of certain kinds must be marketed. A government research body, for instance, must make it acceptable to the government minister who in turn has party politics to consider, not to mention pressures from constituents and supporters who

speak of the victim's death because that would overstate matters. In extremely homogeneous macro activity contexts, where all relevant circumstances were, traditionally, utterly predictable, neither centralization nor standardization nor the combination would stand against institutional experts. Situations of this sort are very rare though. In Canada and the United States, cultural, ethnic, religious and political diversity is considered highly desirable - hence to be promoted, and to a large extent through education. Even in Britain (and elsewhere in Europe) heterogeneous school populations have existed in the past. The class structure saw to that. Nowadays, the Canadian analogy 'cultural mosaic' is coming to apply in Britain in consequence of an enormous influx of Commonwealth immigrants having vastly different cultural backgrounds. So, while not bullet-proof, the centralization-standardization objection is reasonably tenacious.

But who does it hold against? Institutional experts are by definition those who (a) have superior knowledge and understanding in relevant fields (b) are centralized (c) standardized. All experts in education, one might retort, do not meet these conditions. An individual classroom teacher might well fulfill (a); and not (b) or (c). The same goes for remedial specialists, psycho-analysts, and others. Indeed, a body of academics, civil servants and ex-teachers could be formed (such as a revised Schools Council) which could make investigations of local situations with an eye toward macro activity decision-making which may or may not be standardized, depending upon judgments about contextual homogeneity. Condition (a), but not (b) or (c), would be satisfied.

The first point to make is that my objection to experts has been based on (b) and (c), and that (a) is unquestionably desirable. The alternative experts to those in institutions escape the criticisms. Indeed, they should.

Second, ought they, then, to control curriculum? For the most part they have not shown any inclination to do so. Reading specialists and child analysts usually endeavour to diagnose and remediate or treat problems or illness within individuals or small groups; not take on macro, or even most day-to-day micro, activity decisions. As to the other option, independent bodies such as the Schools Council has not been a prominent contender for <u>control</u> of curriculum. Such a group, though, has interesting possibilities. If a large portion of the membership were teachers, not just former teachers, and it endeavoured to

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might include book or curriculum materials publishers. The result can sometimes be a very much different policy than was submitted.

keep in contact with regions and schools not directly represented, a happy combination of knowledge and experience might be reached, and curriculum control a reasonable consideration. It has a way to go yet, though. (And, sadly, there is nothing remotely like this in Canada. Centrally determined curricula are made in each province by a handful of 'curriculum specialists' who rarely have any contact with the ethnically diverse schools which will have to implement their decisions).

Perhaps we should end on a prudential note by recalling that the conditions of decision-making competence merely suggest who might be competent. We are not, as it were, logically compelled to support any one of the candidates, or indeed, reject any of them. And since in different locations and times, the individuals comprising the alternative decision-making groups (i.e. students, parents, experts, etc.) are different, so may be their epistemic credentials, hence competence. A clear preference now may be otherwise later, and vice versa. Equally a clear preference in one location may not be so in another. It is important, therefore, that we never lose sight of the competence conditions and be willing to shift allegiance if need be.

Chapter IX

PARTICIPATION

1. Introduction

If it is political man's natural inclination to want a say in decisions that affect his life, then it is hardly surprising that he should want to take part in curriculum decision-making. Therefore, it remains for us to examine a local form of involvement in which students and, more importantly their parents and other members of the local community, that is to say residents of the geographic area serviced by the school or schools within which the questions of decision-making have arisen, seek to engage themselves along with the school staff and its head in determination of curriculum. For students and parents can surely see an important connection between curriculum and individualistic interests such as the formation of one's 'world view', coming to understand the academic disciplines and preparations for a career and perhaps leisure as well. The local community, too, has interests.[1] Its commercial existence depends upon having residents whose skills are appropriate to local needs, e.g. factory workers and managerial personnel in an industrial region and agricultural workers and planners in rural areas. Equally, local cultural identity, whether it be ethnic, linguistic, religious or something else, is of concern. Both can be directly and profoundly affected by school curriculum: math and science more obviously prepare commercial people than Latin and Greek, and local history and teaching in a native language can help sustain a community's identity whereas their absence might let it fade. In consequence, participation, sharing, in curriculum decisions by students and parents and members of the local community is thought to be important.

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[1] Indeed, 'community schooling' is predicated on the notion that communities have identifiable needs and that schools can in various ways satisfy those needs. Generally speaking, such schools emphasise teaching about their own geographical community - its institutions, people and particular problems, wants and needs. And, attempts are made to avail the resources of the school - classrooms, sports facilities, library, etc. - to public use. In addition, a great many of these schools have adopted plans for shared decision-making between school and community. The procedural arrangements and scope of decisions vary. (Shared decision-making in community schools is, perhaps more widespread in North America than in Europe, since, in the case of the former, it is very much a matter of tradition that the community, through elected school board officials who formally govern all school decision-making and parent-teacher associations which are entirely informal and without

Entitlement to participation is sometimes claimed as a moral or political right. But very often the justification is more pragmatic. Two popular lines of argument are that (a) beneficial consequences for both students and the community as a whole result from the very activity of participating in decision-making,[2] and (b) more competent decision-making will result from some form of participatory arrangement involving the community _et al_ than without them.[3] We will examine both lines of argument and show that neither can satisfactorily justify participation. First the meaning and form of participation will be examined. Then, second, the justifications will be stated; and, third, criticised.

2. Meaning and Form of Participation

Participation is a vague term. It is, quoting the _Random House Dictionary_, 'to take or have a part, as with others'. On its own, this is not very helpful. If one thinks of curriculum decision-making there are numerous ways in which a _part_ could be taken: different parts and different ways of taking part. Suppose we agree that all parents who have children in a particular school and all members of the local community ought to have a say in deciding the curriculum. How, first, is the _say_ to be manifest? Are parents and community members to be invited to the school to join in a general meeting in which the issues are to be hammered out, thereby having a direct say? Or, is there to be representation of parents and community on a committee which is in charge, something which is common in community schools (particularly in North America). Second, is this say to be a voice in the final outcome, such as a vote on a policy which if carried will be implemented,

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legal power, should take part in running schools.)

Although an enormous literature on community schooling has grown up in recent years, most of it not very erudite. Two useful exposes are Cyril Poster, _School and Community_ (London: Macmillian, 1971) and _The School and the Community_, presentations made to an international conference of the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation, for the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 1975.

[2]See, for instance, Graham Bond, _Parent-Teacher Partnership_ (London: Evans Brothers, 1973); Don Davies, ed., _Schools Where Parents Make a Difference_ (Boston: Institute for Responsive Education, 1976); Charlotte Ryan, _The Open Partnership_ (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976); Philip and Susan Jones, _Parents, Unite!_ (Wyden, 1976); Martin Buskin, _Parent Power_ (New York: Walker, 1975); and R.I. Berridge, _The Community Education Handbook_ (Midland, Michigan: Pendell, 1973).

[3]See D. Bridges 'What's the Use of Meetings?', _Proceedings of the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain_, Vol. IX, July 1975, pp. 7-25.

or is it something secondary like a solicited opinion or commissioned report which will be taken into account when the actual decision is made by someone else, as for example when a school head asks teachers or parents for their reactions to the possibility of introducing a sex-education course or when the head asks teachers and parents to form a committee which will look into and report on the new courses to be added to the curriculum? To put it briefly, is it an actual decision-making role or a consulting role? If the latter, is consultation to be mandatory, that is, members of the community et al must be consulted; or is it to be discretionary, which means that the decision-maker may or may not ask for opinions, reports, etc., as he chooses? Third, on what is one to have a say: all curriculum decisions, macro activity decisions, micro activity decisions, some combination of each or some part of one or the other?

Another sort of problem encountered in talk about participation is that the word is rather cavalierly interchanged with 'collective', 'democratic' and 'group' decision-making. Collective decision-making is, I think, the broader term; and participation, i.e. having a say, is what collective decision-making enables individuals to do. Collective decision-making is usually contrasted with individual decision-making, and by coming to decisions collectively (rather than only one person deciding) it is possible for other individuals (or their representatives) to participate or have a say in the making of those decisions.

Now given that participation can take many procedural forms, such as having a say in the final decision and consultation, and many versions of each, it would seem quite natural to ask of any of those forms if it is democratic. That a form of participation is said to be democratic, may be taken as a description or perhaps justification for it; for presumably one could be involved in the making of a decision and have one's views disregarded or ballot counted as less than those of others, and still be regarded as participating in decision-making, though perhaps not democratically. Finally, one could participate in the making of a decision, and democratically so, without being in a group. One participates in the making of a decision if one is consulted, as when a parent's opinion is solicited by the head, or when one casts a ballot where one has had no prior contact with others in connection with the issues, as a hermit could do at election time; yet in neither case has a group come together to deliberate the issues and then decide. For group decision-making usually refers to a physical assemblage (though one could imagine bizarre arrangements where persons are not physically together, yet are in a group, such as a multi-telephone hook-up) which

discusses matters - has a meeting.

Our concern is with collective decision-making, hence participation. Democratic and group decision-making are set aside because quite reasonable attempts are sometimes made to justify participation on the basis of both beneficial consequences and improved decision-making competence whether or not that participation is seen to be democratic or carried out in groups. It could, for example, be argued that if members of the (e.g. business) community were consulted by the schools, or had a limited representation on curriculum committees, they would be able to make a valuable contribution, though their participation may be neither fully democratic (e.g. in terms of representation or weight given to opinions) nor in groups.

A further and very important point is that attempts to justify participation are nonsense unless some specification is given of the sort of decisions to be made and who are to be the participants. As a matter of logic, there is not simply participation, some entity adrift in the universe, there is participation <u>by</u> person or persons, and <u>in</u> something. Our concern of course is with community members, parents and so on and in curriculum decision-making. But notice, on the matter of <u>justification</u>, that what would make a plausible case for participation by a community of intelligent and educated people might not suffice for counterparts with fewer epistemic credentials. Equally, objects-of-decision differ in content, so what must be known to decide about one may differ from another (cf. textbook selections versus the colour of school uniforms).

3. Justifications for Participation

We face two problems in producing justifications for participation. First, we must make what some regard as the rather dubious assumption that individuals will be <u>motivated</u> to participate if entitled. Many industrial and educational participation schemes have not had the desired effects because of the indifference of participants, failure to come to meetings, etc. We will not, however, pursue this further since it is conceivable that in future this could change - perhaps if participation was greatly encouraged by industry and the schools. Second, it is not at all clear that any single line of argument would necessarily suffice for different forms of participation - i.e. support for mandatory consultation may not be support for full participation. We will deal with this problem as we go along.

(a) Procedural Benefits

Some people are convinced that the very act of participating in school decisions has consequences that are beneficial to the participants. The point is not that the decisions made will be in any way more competent, but, rather, that engaging in the decision-making procedure is advantageous. One finds, particularly in the popular literature, a great many alleged procedural benefits, as I will call them; but we will deal with only a representative three.

First it is sometimes alleged that the ethos of the school - the attitude toward the school staff, to schooling and to learning on the part of all members of the educational community including teachers and students - would be greatly improved, or maintained at a high level, if everyone had a share in decision-making. Students, for example, might be more motivated to learn if they had some say in the content of courses or the way they are taught. They might, for instance, be consulted on their preference of novels to be read in literature class or have a vote on the destination of class field trips in history or a say in whether the social studies class is to be mostly formal lectures or individualized self-study projects. The teaching staff might feel rather more like professionals than hired help if they were invited to take part in curriculum policy making, rather than have it determined by, in many British schools, the head or in North American schools by the schoolboard or government. And parents might feel less like disregarded and ineffectual outsiders and hence less hostile toward the school, if they were invited to participate. Indeed, Charlotte Ryan found, on visits to numerous community schools in the American Northeast where parents were involved in the running of the school,that the parents felt less animosity toward the school after participation had begun.[4]

The second procedural benefit often claimed is that a child's moral, political and intellectual development would be enhanced by practice in determining his or her own curriculum as well as managing student government affairs. Jasper Ungoed-Thomas maintains that through democratic participation children learn about democratic institutions and how to function within them. Moral education is promoted as well as political because in following democratic procedures children acquire virtues such as respect for others,independence of mind and

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[4]The Open Partnership, op. cit., p. 17.

responsibility to the community.[5] Scrimshaw says intellectual dispositions such as confidence are developed;[6] and Bridges indicates the likelihood of intellectual development resulting from having

> to contemplate alternative points of view; to subject hypotheses, or have hypotheses subjected to criticism; to take into account adverse and often conflicting evidence and arguments, to defend and justify points of principle; to take the interests of others into account - and all this under the further discipline, which purely academic deliberation commonly escapes, of having to produce some kind of decision and to accept a share of the responsibility for its consequences .[7]

This line of argument could apply to adults as well. Through participation in school decision-making why could not parents come to understand democratic procedures more fully, attend more to the interests of others and sharpen their abilities to deliberate and debate? The Taylor Commission which strongly recommended participation, suggested that parental apathy and undemonstrated competence in educational decision-making was largely due to insufficient opportunity to practice. Here would be the opportunity to practice.

Third, active decision-making involvement in schools by community members could possibly militate against 'anomie' and 'alienation' - lack of direction and feeling of powerlessness. The argument is that modern society has lost its sense of 'community'. Value of the family, sharing, concern for others, friendship, and so on have been eroded by the growth of mass society, of huge governmental and industrial bureaucracies. These highly impersonal edifices have not only washed away what were formerly thought to be absolute social values, leaving individuals ethically adrift, but they have come to dominate economic and political life to the extent that individuals no longer feel in control. The valueless drifting feeling is often called anomie and the powerlessness, alienation. They are diametric opposites: the former, a lack of governance by social and moral rules; the latter, an inescapable governance of political, economic and social life. Robert Ashcroft has suggested that active participation in schooling decisions by parents,

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[5] Our School (London: Longman, 1972), Chapter two.

[6] 'Should Schools be Participant Democracies?' in D. Bridges and P. Scrimshaw ed., Values and Authority in Schools (London: Hodder and Stroughton, 1975).

[7] Op. cit., p. 17.

indeed all segments of the community, might contribute significantly to the reawakening of community mindedness, that is, to the anchoring of social values, and to the restored feeling of individuals' powers of self direction.[8] For, in deciding about schooling, one is not only active in the decision-making process per se, but is making decisions (in the case of macro decisions) which may have a bearing on the future of the community and perhaps even society as a whole.

There could, of course, be numerous other additions to this list, but many of them, insofar as they describe incidental and contingent benefits to participation in virtue of engagement in decision-making procedures, would be open to the same sort of criticism I will level at those already stated. So, we will consider, now, some items in the second line of argument. These, unlike the first, have as their main contention the view that collective decision-making is likely to result in more competently made decisions than would be the case otherwise.

(b) Improved Decision-Making

David Bridges has presented four justifications for participation. One of them was included under the heading 'educational benefits' and was discussed in the preceding section. Bridges is concerned to defend collective decision-making against a single person deciding, and he makes specific reference to students and teachers being involved in policy matters which might well be handled by the head. It is unclear whether he intends participation to be limited to those he specifies and again unclear whether he has in mind a specific range of decisions for them. Since there does not seem to be any emphasis on a restriction of eligible decision-makers or permissible range of decisions we will treat his position as applicable to community members and parents as well, and to both macro and micro decision-making.

There are, however, some limitations of scope. It is not collective decision-making in all forms that he is supporting but rather group decision-making, and in which there is discussion of the issues.[9] In addition, he wants to stipulate that the sort of 'discussions' that he is concerned with are only those which meet certain normative conditions such as those in which there is willingness on the part of all parties

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[8] 'School as a Base for Community Development', School and Community, op. cit., pp. 25-6, 29-30.

[9] Op. cit., p. 8.

to learn from the exchange of ideas and to modify, even change, their points of view. The intention in giving this normative account is to separate 'discussions' from other forms of group talk such as command, rhetoric, brow-beating, and so on.[10]

Although Bridges is primarily concerned to justify such things as committee meetings, to show them more advantageous than simply leaving matters to the head, at least the first two of the arguments to be presented, as well as 'educational benefits' which has already been examined, have (limited) application more broadly, as will become evident, to forms of participation where there is at least some exchange or transmission of information. Indeed Bridges seems to be aware of the broader scope in the latter sections of his paper where he considers literary discussion - a non-group form of participation.. One obvious area of applicability, if we consider these arguments (the first two anyway) as having broader scope, is that consultation, a non-group form of participation, will be at least partly covered. We turn now to the arguments.

(i) Accumulated input

Bridges maintains, in the spirit of Aristotle[11] and Mill,[12] the view that 'the group is likely collectively to have access to more information, ideas and points of view or policies than any one member of the group has individually',[13] Even dull or uninformed members may at sometime have something to add, and simply in virtue of their meagre potential for contributions the group as a whole is that much enriched. Evidently Paul Feyerabend would agree. He remarks: 'There is no idea, however ancient and absurd, that is not capable of improving our knowledge'.[14] Presumably therefore, if a school were deciding whether or not to implement a cafeteria curriculum for its more senior students, members of, say, the business community might be able to contribute significantly, despite perhaps weak pedagogical knowledge, by suggesting problems to which this manner of curriculum selection might give rise from the point of view of the commercial world if students fail to take courses in, for example, mathematics.

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[10] Op. cit., pp. 9-10.

[11] Politics (Book III; Chapter XI, paragraph 14).

[12] 'On Liberty' (1859), Utilitarianism (London: Fontana, 1962), p. 146.

[13] Op. cit., p. 11.

[14] Against Method (London: NLB, 1975), p. 47.

Now what is being argued is not that the group necessarily has greater resources than those of any one individual.[15] For it may be that in fact one member of the group knows what the others know, and more. Even in a question of determining the interests (i.e. needs, and/or wants) of group members, where they as individuals might be said to know better than any other single individual, it would be possible, at least in principle, for that one member to determine, perhaps through prior consultation, the interests of the others. Nor is he arguing that if the group had greater resources than its individuals it could exploit them.[16] Perhaps the group would not be temperamentally suited, or be unable to agree on a procedure for arriving at decisions (e.g. voting vs. consensus). Rather, his view is that the collectivity is likely to be more richly endowed epistemically than any of its parts - contingent, of course, upon certain facts about those involved.

(ii) The hypothesis refutation theory

Leaning heavily on Karl Popper's notions of conjecture and refutation,[17] Bridges explains that at some stage in decision-making it is necessary to have hypotheses suggested (conjecture), and then subjected to attacks (refutation) from the group - the idea being to see how the hypotheses hold up under criticism.[18] Bridges grants that the conjecture may be more in the province of expert opinion - something brought to the group for scrutiny - but that, unquestionably, refutation is an essential part of decision-making, and a part that can be played by even the most intellectually humble. For an observation, even made unwittingly, can be sufficient to cast doubt on a theory or proposal.

So, a situation could be envisioned in which, upon expert advice, consideration is being given to different series of reading texts. The preferred series, it is maintained by the many, is unavailable because it is out of print. It takes only one, if otherwise uninformed, individual to have seen it currently available in the window display of a local distributor to refute the popular conception and contribute significantly to the acquistion of the preferred series.

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[15] Op. cit., p. 11.

[16] Ibid.

[17] See Conjectures and Refutations: the growth of scientific knowledge (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962).

[18] Op. cit., pp. 12-13.

(iii) The accommodation consensus model

Here Bridges wants to show that discussion can be an extremely efficient means of getting to the truth or of coming to agreement. His point, following Michael Polanyi,[19] is that unfettered discussions permit a rapid interchange of information and opinion through pronouncements, quick rebuttals, inserted opinions, alternatives, amendments, and so on - all done informally as the discussion proceeds.[20] This almost instantaneous accommodation of one person's views by the others and use of them as a jumping-off point for restatement of the position, etc. can be likened to the mutual adjustment of the hundreds of cars pouring in and out of the Marble Arch roundabout. Each driver finds a path through the roundabout by accommodating himself to the like manoeuvres of the other drivers - braking, accelerating, edging to the right, then left - thereby taking advantage of every opportunity to hasten progress. The point here is that through the independent functioning of hundreds of drivers simultaneously, hour after hour and day after day, an infinite number of efficient patterns emerge - more patterns at any rate than could be plotted by a traffic designer - in consequence of which one can safely say that collective decision-making is, in terms of efficiency, superior to a single individual making decisions.

In order to bolster this view, Bridges recounts Polanyi's analogy of several people making a jig-saw puzzle: each individual watches the overall progress and waits for just the right moment to make his contribution, so as to further the progress without getting in anyone's way. Polanyi uses this analogy to argue against centralized decision-making in science, and his point there as, Bridges' is, here, is that to centralize would cause the operations of those being decided about to slow down or stop until such time as the centralized decision-maker finished deliberating about and directing one person's operation and moved on to the next. To say it once again, the point is one of efficiency: the many can do more!

The parallel is, of course, with discussion, just as the traffic roundabout and puzzle-making function more efficiently without strict and external (unitary) control, Bridges claims that discussions will function with equivalent efficiency if they are not tightly reined by (the unitary control of) a chairman who wants to proceed step-by-step according to his own conception of the best means to solve the problem

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[19] See The Logic of Liberty (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951).

[20] Op. cit., pp. 13-16.

at hand. In other words, truth or agreement can be efficiently and profitably pursued by the mutual accommodation of individuals working together, contingent upon, and this is important, the willingness of those participating to be responsive to the others - to give them attention when deserved - and upon the number of participants and dissidents being conducive to such an exercise.

4. Criticisms of the Proposed Justifications

We turn now to an examination of both lines of argument. Neither, I will suggest, provides very solid backing for the claim that curriculum decisions ought to be determined by some form of participation.

(a) Procedural Benefits

The first line of argument upheld the view that simply by engaging in the procedures of participation individuals stood to gain educationally (i.e. politically, intellectually and morally); the school ethos could improve; and members of the community might come to feel less the anguishes of anomie and alienation.

This is a causal argument: participation in collective decision-making procedures causes changes in school ethos, education and anomie-alienation. But the causal relation holds only if certain contingent conditions of circumstance and individual human response are satisfied. The circumstances, the procedures, must not be replete with hostility, mendacity, power mongering, manipulation, apathy, indifference and patronage, for these would not be conducive to bringing about the desired results - i.e. the procedural benefits. (Remember, participation does not logically imply democratic procedures or principles). Equally, human responses to stimuli - resulting from engagement in the decision-making procedures - are dependent upon psychological readiness. Ethos and anomie-alienation will not be abated if participants are mistrustful, intimidated and apathetic, and educational benefits will not result if students (or whoever) have no concept of procedural rules, etc., fail to understand the purpose or value of the decisions, are afraid to speak out in group (e.g. debate), and so on. Since these contingencies cannot be guaranteed in every instance of participatory decision-making, this line of argument does not necessarily justify participation.

As an example, take the case of a school that is to have decisions about course offerings (e.g. Is history to be taught? If so, which histories?) to be determined by a school council on which there are

representatives of the teaching staff, students, parents and members of the community - as is the case in many community schools. Suppose there is a bitter division between those who strongly believe that much of the history taught in the school should be local history and not world history, and those who feel that such parochial nonsense will have disastrous effects on the students' understanding of world politics, etc., and a further division between both of these groups and others who feel that history, regardless of content, ought to be optional. Now it does not seem unreasonable in the least to suppose further that all parties may not only fail to agree, but as well may in the course of meetings (possibly several), generate an atmosphere in the school community of hostility, closed mindedness and disinclination to continue with collective decision-making. In such an environment it would hardly be surprising if the school ethos deteriorated, the lessons of democracy were learned by no one and feelings of alienation and anomie were not abated. For in situations like this, the circumstances are not really conducive to producing the procedural benefits mentioned; and participants, if they are to benefit, must be, among other things, sufficiently mature and stable psychologically to ward off threatening personal attacks. As well, participants must see this as an exercise in which flexibility, logical argument, and so forth are essentials. Otherwise they will be personally incapable of deriving the benefits. Now, I would not for a moment suggest that such benefits are impossible consequences of participation, only that they are not necessary - i.e. are contingent upon circumstances and personalities.

This line of objection however, is open to the complaint that it portrays collective decision-making as occasioned by ill-will and disharmony; that if existent participatory arrangements were surveyed, workable arrangements would be seen to prevail. Hence, if it is usually the case that participation yields procedural benefits, then participation is (usually) justified.

There are two points to be made. First, to justify participation on the basis of a causal relation that usually holds is, albeit weaker than a necessary relation, nevertheless prima facie satisfactory. Justifications can be inductive as well as deductive. But with inductive justifications in this case a problem arises. How could we develop a reliable empirical test for ethos, alienation and anomie? On the one hand, we would have to rely on reports from members of the community and others. What observed behaviours would indicate incontrovertibly an improved ethos (and not something else)? On the other hand, how

could we be sure that participation and nothing else was the cause of the benefits? For instance, school ethos (along with a general feeling of well-being) might improve to some degree if, in an economically depressed urban area, a large new and profitable industry began, which alleviated unemployment and family tensions that often accompany poverty. In consequence of this difficulty I would suggest that a justification along these lines would be rather flimsy.

The second point is by far the more important. Even if acceptable empirical tests for procedural benefits could be created; and even if they showed that wherever some form of participation in curriculum decisions was instituted the procedural benefits did indeed result with impressive frequency, one could still ask whether these benefits provided an adequate justification for participation. I would answer no: first because there is no guarantee that the actual curriculum decisions thus made would be competent, and that the ill-consequences of incompetently made curriculum decisions could well outweigh the benefits of participation; and second, an attendant point, because the benefits of participation could reasonably be derived in other ways, without thereby risking the undesirable outcomes of poor curriculum decisions.

The reason why procedural benefits are given short shrift in the company of curriculum consequences is that the former are secondary to the purpose of schooling, whereas the latter are central. For regardless of which view of schooling one takes, it must surely have at its core a serious concern for the transmission of knowledge and understanding (our preoccupation with curriculum would be pointless otherwise). Admittedly, school ethos and anomie-alienation are important to the practical possibility of schooling; but unless the malfeasance of both is such that schooling is prevented on their account, and clearly we have not been portraying them as such, then secondary they remain. 'Educational benefits', i.e. political, moral and intellectual, as we discussed them are indeed a part of the knowledge and understanding to be acquired; but there is much more besides that could be lost if participatory decision-making is incompetent. Would curriculum decisions suffer by allowing participation? I suggest they would; but will defer a demonstration of this to the next section, since in it we are intending to consider claims about improved competence resulting from participation.

There is yet a further point to be added in support of this conclusion which I mentioned earlier, namely that the benefits could well be derived anyway, without risking the costs of participation. This being

so, the risks would hardly be warranted; and in this event even further ground is taken from under the claim that these procedural benefits will justify participation. This is hardly the place to set out a range of school activities that could bring about the benefits discussed, but it might be worthwhile to mention some examples. School ethos, first, might be improved by sincere attempts on the part of the school to explain policy to parents and members of the community. The usual means by which this is done (often half-heartedly) is an open night to which parents are invited; but something rather more imaginative and effective could surely be tried. Indeed, community schools are more or less committed to the principles of close relations with the community and hence must, in virtue of the credo, find ways of maintaining, at very least, a satisfactory ethos. As for the educative advantages of participation (i.e. political, moral and intellectual), surely such things as mock parliaments, debates and the like, would develop these qualities as well as actual participation in curriculum decision-making. Concerning anomie and alienation: as mentioned earlier, the problem is rather too large to deal with here; and simple suggestions would be pretentious.

A closing word about procedural benefits as a justification for participation: it should be noted that there is quite a difference between the two main forms of participation, namely having a say in the final outcome and being consulted. The importance of this distinction is that the ill-consequences of incompetent decision-making, vis a vis the quality of decisions made, would not seem likely in the case of consultation, since the participants' opinions in the matter can be assessed by someone who is competent (assuming there is someone who is competent) and then be either accepted, in whole or part, or rejected. The objection from incompetence would thus be dropped. However, while I would have no further objections, on the face of it, to consultation, it still remains the case that the alleged procedural benefits would not adequately justify consultation per se, for the reasons given earlier.

(b) Improved Decision-Making

This line of justification was intended to establish the epistemic superiority of collective decision-making over decision-making by an individual (bearing in mind that the third argument had specific application to group discussions). However, it fails. It fails to demonstrate that groups will necessarily be more competent decision-makers than individuals. And, it fails to show that the collectivity of concern to us - namely, some combination of teachers, students, parents and members

of the local community as in a council where all groups are represented - will even likely be more competent than either an individual or a specified group such as educational experts or teachers.

(i) Accumulated input

Bridges himself points out that the accumulated input view will justify participation only if certain contingencies are met, namely, if it is not the case that one participant knows more than all of the others together, and if the group is not prevented from exploiting its resources of knowledge (e.g. because its members are temperamentally unsuited). But it is the necessity of these contingencies having to be met that gives away the force of the argument. For how could we ever be certain that both contingencies would be met in every possible participation group? Plainly, we could not.

Nevertheless, Bridges thinks that, despite being an empirical argument, it is strong. This, to my way of thinking, is entirely dependent upon who the decision-makers are and what they are deciding. We have discussed at length, in previous chapters, the severe limitations of the various categories of participant when deciding on their own, and I do not believe that their competence is sufficiently bolstered when they (or their representatives) are taken together. The fallacy is in thinking that the knowledge of a group of people accumulates like money in a bank (cf. his two analogies: 'contributions to the feast' and 'treasure trove'). True, data (or information) accumulates; but unlike with money, where more of the same is definitely desirable, duplicated knowledge is not. Furthermore, for information to be of value it must be central to the object-of-decision. No such problem exists in the case of accumulating money. In consequence, it seems reasonable to suggest that, barring the vastly superior knowledge of one member, the group may be richer in breadth of knowledge - knowledge of both theoretical descriptions and pragmatic outcomes of alternatives, and of justifications. But what about depth of understanding or centrality?

Our previous invectives against laymen as curriculum decision-makers focussed to a large extent on the superficiality of their knowledge - on their lack of a sophisticated understanding of the important matters, i.e. centrality, and of the intricacies and subtle problems to which they give rise, i.e. depth. Now the serious mistake in the 'accumulated input' view, and the fallacy just mentioned, is to think that this problem can be overcome by, for example, adding more information sources to the group. That would simply add to the stock of data

and at best extend the breadth of knowledge. Nor can the problem be overcome by insisting that educational experts (whether they be institutional experts or members of the teaching profession) be a part of the group. For groups are not competent decision-makers in virtue of the sum total knowledge of the group. They are competent insofar as they are able to come to agreements. And the fact that an expert is able to see the depth and centrality of matters is not to say that he can ever make others understand in order to secure agreement. For instance, it takes quite a high level of intelligence to comprehend possible relations between education and the good life, as would have a bearing on some macro activity decisions, or to understand some psychological explanations of a student's readiness to read or solve mathematical problems at a certain level, as would relate to some micro activity decisions. Equally, the ability to understand problems, explanations, and so forth is dependent upon having considerable knowledge in relevant areas; and it is not at all obvious that laymen will possess this. The irony is that in a group, knowledge useful to decision-making only accumulates if it can be shared by a majority (or a large enough portion of the group to carry a decision); and it only accumulates in this way to the point where it becomes too recondite for the 'majority', after which the group's accumulated decision-making knowledge no longer measures up to the sum of knowledge of its individual members.

As I said before, the force of this objection rests heavily on the composition of the collectivity and nature of problems being tackled. A harmoniously working group of institutional experts and teachers might be ideal for most curriculum decisions; indeed I will support this in the next chapter. But the composition of such a group is quite different than we are interested in here: our concern is, after all, largely with parents and members of the local community. Still, the latter ought not to be ruled out entirely. From the standpoint of competence, at any rate, the community et al could decide macro issues such as the principles (e.g. aims) of school programmes in which they have a legitimate interest - this being an area of decision-making in which experts are impossible (as we discussed in a previous chapter). Equally, some micro decisions, such as a choice among resource materials which the teachers have determined to be of equivalent pedagogical value, could be made, without fear of ill-consequence, by the group. Precisely which decisions across the range of curriculum the group ought to have jurisdiction over would depend on piecemeal assessments of the groups' competence in light of its composition. One form of participation on which these

objectives would not fall would be consultation. Because final decisions would be made, and non central or duplicate information rejected, either by one person or a group (e.g. teachers) whose claim to epistemic competence is higher, ill-consequences of 'amateur' decision-making would not be felt. In any case, one reason why consultation is desirable is that it does allow for data gathering (e.g. a teacher wanting to know about the home life of a student) which is, of course, the mainstay of the 'accumulated input' argument.

A retrospective problem arises here. If participatory decision-making is as acceptable from the standpoint of competence, as is, for example, parental control of such matters as final selection of aims or curriculum materials (under certain circumstances), who then is to be entitled? Since the issue is no longer about competence it is beyond the scope of our investigation. It becomes, then, a moral issue, if parents claim a (moral) right to governance of their children or a political issue, if the community can be said to have title to determine such matters as school aims when they, the community, will have to live with the consequences, i.e. of children educated in one way (e.g. having certain skills and understandings) rather than another.

In summary, the accumulated input view will not necessarily justify participation by the community, parents, etc. in curriculum decisions because the strength of the argument is dependent upon certain contingencies about the participants, which cannot be guaranteed. Moreover, the plausibility of the view even as a support for participation in the general case is undermined by a simplistic and inaccurate account of the use of knowledge by decision-making groups. What emerges from our discussion is that information, or data, the provision of which is the alleged value of the accumulated input view, is useful, but is only a part of the knowledge required for decision-making. So even if a group benefits from this input, the very fact of it does not thereby justify group decision-making. What it does go toward justifying is consultation, the main purpose of which is to acquire information.

(ii) Hypothesis refutation

A species of the accumulated input view, this theory suggests a purpose to which incoming knowledge from diverse sources can be put, namely to falsify or cast doubts upon the truth, cogency or plausibility of a proposition. Though Bridges does not mention it, this view shares one of the contingencies of its predecessor: one member of the group cannot know more than all of the other members taken together. It is conceivable, after all, that no other member of the group has information

to refute any of the hypotheses being considered which has not previously been considered by one of its members. For this reason the hypothesis refutation view will not necessarily justify participation by (any group of) parents, community members, etc.

Of course, by reversing this point, it could be argued that in any group there is always the possibility of one of its members having some new piece of information to refute the hypothesis under consideration; that unless we specify in advance that no members of the collectivity have such knowledge, this view always has the potential to justify participation. Now, to respond, it is unarguably true that groups may, though not always, have this capacity to generate such information. But, first, are the collectivities we are concerned with likely to have this capacity in curriculum matters, and if so which ones? Second, if they do, in specific curriculum matters, would this fact alone justify participation (in those matters)?

No, on both counts. On the first point: macro decisions about the programme of a school - about its aims, purposes, etc. - and micro decisions about procedures - about what to teach, when and how (about which activities should take place) - can only be made, competently, in light of considerable practical and theoretical knowledge. (We have discussed this at length before). As argued in the proceeding section, depth, breadth and centrality of understanding is not likely to be possessed by laymen, other than perhaps in macro decisions about which among alternative schools they ought to send their children to or which school programme a given community ought to adopt for the school it supports, or micro decisions about the destinations of school field trips, once equally acceptable alternatives have been ratified by the teachers. If, in the other areas of curriculum the layman is not especially competent then the information he provides to refute hypotheses will be pedestrian. But since decisions are, for the most part, not about pedestrian matters, the occasions when the layman contributes significant information to refute hypotheses are likely to be few and possibly fortuitous even then. That a particular series of mathematics texts is appropriate, or that a particular child needs reading remediation, are matters, hypotheses about which, involve areas of knowledge from which the layman is not likely to be capable of drawing, even for the limited purposes of refutation.

Now the objection is not that parents and community members have no information useful to hypothesis refutation. Often they have, though they may not be aware that it has this use. For instance, we have

discussed the importance of contextual knowledge (material and conceptual) to curriculum decisions; and it is quite obvious that parents et al could provide valuable knowledge about, for example, a particular child's perception of the school, e.g. whether it is a place of intimidation and imprisonment or pleasantness and enlightenment, (i.e. conceptual context) or a child's economic and social circumstances, e.g. the family's ability to pay for essentials such as clothing, food and books and his relations with siblings and peers - something which might have a bearing on his ability and inclination to learn at school (i.e. material context). However, the significance of each report can be determined only by someone who understands the subtleties of the issue. So the layman may well contribute to the refutation of an hypothesis rather than personally refute it.

To answer the second question: even if parents et al could be shown to be in possession of a considerable amount of knowledge that was useful to refutation of hypotheses (assume, for example, that they were, themselves, well educated and informed about schooling), would this, then, justify participation? I think it would not justify a form of participation in which they were responsible for the actual making of decisions, but could support consultation. I take the former view because decision-making typically involves considerably more than presentation of information to test hypotheses. Even if hypothesis formulation is left to experts who bring proposals to the meeting to be worked out in detail, there is still the need to take these theoretical descriptions of alternatives and surmise the pragmatic outcomes, reformulate the descriptions, and much else besides, which requires considerably more sophistication in awareness of the problems than is possessed by someone who simply has information which may or may not have a bearing on the issues. In short, competent decision-makers need more than this. On the other hand, the very fact that this information could be useful suggests that decision-makers should have access to it - to accept it or reject it. Indeed one condition of competence is 'adequate access to data'; and this condition could be fulfilled, without any attendant disadvantages to the overall quality of decision-making, if those in possession of this knowledge were available for consultation. Mandatory consultation, however, would be too strong because decision-makers could thereby be impelled to receive trivial, irrelevant or duplicated information which could impair their efficiency without a corresponding gain in useful knowledge. Discretionary consultation is therefore supported.

(iii) Accommodation consensus

This view purports to justify a form of collective decision-making, group decisions (e.g. meetings), by arguing that 'many minds' working toward a common end by mutually accommodating one another are more efficient than, and epistemically superior to, one mind. So, committees are more competent decision-makers than single persons. This, I think, is not necessarily true. Indeed, in order for accommodation consensus to work at all effectively, very careful selection of the participants would be essential.

As Bridges notes, groups will be mutually accommodating contingent upon (a) participants willingly responding to others, i.e. taking their arguments seriously (b) participants being limited in number to a size compatible with the undertaking (c) the range of dissidence not being too great. The very fact of these contingencies prevents this argument from justifying the value of all meetings; and (a) and (c) keep it from supporting any meetings in which there are, for example, either strong political reasons for some participants remaining intransigent, ((a)), or even two fundamentally opposed positions ((c)). If, in a particular school, the curriculum decision-making body had argumentative members or strong representation from any militant interest group with an axe to grind, so to speak, e.g. marxists, feminists, or Blacks, then not just a single meeting but all meetings of that body could well proceed very slowly, and painfully so.

A further contingency assumed by this view is that participants will be sufficiently intelligent and knowledgeable to function efficiently. The finesse with which central London drivers negotiate the Marble Arch roundabout or jig-saw puzzle-makers integrate their efforts are practiced arts. Fill Marble Arch and the jig-saw puzzle team with first-timers and see how efficient they are! In curriculum the situation is worse because, more than a pedestrian skill (such as driving a car or putting together a puzzle), there is needed special knowledge of curriculum and requisite intelligence. Many laymen may not meet the former condition, some laymen and students (if they are allowed on the decision-making body) may not meet the latter.

Some of the initial plausibility of this argument comes from the analogies used to describe it; but neither is entirely appropriate. Polanyi's puzzle-makers clearly have a single-minded purpose toward which the many can contribute productively, without political undercurrents, pointless arguments and getting side tracked, all on the way to a destination which may not be clearly defined at the outset, as when

a committee meets to redesign a curriculum without having a clear idea of the options. And, while puzzle-makers and meeting participants see completion of the overall endeavour as their objective, drivers in the roundabout are concerned only about their own progress. This leads to a further point. Bridges applauds the traffic roundabout because an infinite variety of patterns are created by those who pick their way around. This is more than a single traffic designer could plot. But an infinite number of patterns do not necessarily imply maximum efficiency. A single designer might quickly and easily plan an orderly and limited series of patterns which enables traffic to circulate far more quickly than the frantic chaos currently allows.

In sum, the accommodation consensus theory is highly unconvincing. It might be used to explain why some committees work so well, but one suspects they are relatively rare.

5. Consultation

If community members, parents, etc. ought to participate directly in curriculum decision-making, it has not been demonstrated (except for certain macro and micro decisions). Consultation seems another matter though, because those who are competent to decide could filter incoming information, accepting or rejecting as necessary. Given the importance of contextual data, which parents, students and members of the local community could readily supply, and to which teachers and others would not otherwise have direct access, consultation seems prudent. I say prudent rather than necessary, implying that discretionary and not mandatory consultation is called for, because, although it is a necessary condition of competence that contextual and other knowledge be sought, and a pragmatic condition of that competence that there be adequate access to data, it is not of logical necessity (or at least not obviously so) that contextual knowledge be gleaned through direct reports from the agents. So consultation would not be the only means by which such knowledge could be acquired, and to insist upon mandatory consultation could subject decision-makers to undue repetition, etc. of detail, and corresponding impairment of efficiency. Nevertheless, it seems a strong likelihood that discretionary consultation would be an important means of fulfilling the 'access' condition of competence, and by extension part of the knowledge conditions.

Chapter X

CONTROL OF THE CURRICULUM AND THE COMPETENCE OF TEACHERS

1. Introduction

Teachers, in consultation with all members of the educational community, especially the institutional experts, ought to have control of most curriculum decisions. It very much depends upon the nature of the decision whether control ought to be in the hands of general bodies such as national or provincial assemblies or local education authorities or individual schools; or whether individual classroom teachers ought to decide; or whether matters ought to be left to subject specialists at any of these levels. But whatever the case, among the alternative decision-makers under consideration teachers are the most competent; though support for them is rather more on the basis of lesser of evils than embodiment of an ideal.

By a teacher we will mean anyone who is professionally employed to plan lessons, instruct and be responsible for the academic progress of students in schools which are either supported or recognized by the state. This, therefore, would eliminate those who teach in unrecognized alternative schools (e.g. free school). fringe schools (e.g. language schools) and colleges and universities. 'Teachers' from the latter two types of institution have, quite obviously, different concerns vis a vis schooling; and the often radical views of the former make assessment of their competence and schooling objectives difficult as a group, since they often have little in common with one another. Mention of competence brings up the question of epistemic credentials and qualification as a teacher. Relevant university degrees and professional training certificates would be obvious parts of a normative condition for qualification as a teacher; indeed increasingly they have become practical requirements for appointment. But, they are not, nor are other normative conditions, unless specified later, to be regarded as necessary conditions (logical or practical) for individuals who are called teachers. Clearly, some individuals professionally employed as teachers do not have these credentials; and our objective is to show that the teaching profession, as it is, is the most competent decision-making alternative.

Finally, claims about teachers, their organizations and professional activities, will apply only to those in advanced Western nations, i.e. Western Europe, United Kingdom, Australasia, Scandanavia, the United States and Canada. These nations, and, perhaps, exceptions not mentioned,

share a relatively high level of educational understanding and development of school institutions. Claims about the competence of teachers are more or less uniform throughout (though with some exceptions); but this could not be said about teachers in, for example, the third world which does not have a long tradition of concern with mass secular education.

The case which we will now make for teachers is based upon fulfillment of the conditions of competence. It will be the business of this chapter to show how these conditions are satisfied.

2. Teachers and the Conditions of Competence

To determine competence we have developed a range of considerations that form a three-sided matrix: conditions of competence, activities and contexts in and about which decisions are to be made and potential decision-makers. The only remaining alternative, teachers, do not ideally satisfy the requirements of all points in the matrix but, because they are significantly better than the others or any combination of them, we are, at least on the basis of competence, obliged to suggest them as curriculum decision-makers.

(a) The Abilities Condition

The abilities condition, which includes cognitive abilities such as foresight, clarity and rigour and affective abilities such as the ability to stick to decisions even when under personal (e.g. verbal) attacks, is not satisfied of logical necessity by virtue of employment as a teacher. It is at least possible that such employment could be given to a moral coward with little if any foresight, etc. Indeed, criticisms are from time-to-time made against teachers to the effect that they are unmotivated and unintelligent. One accusation is that the teaching profession is a refuge for individuals with insufficient ambition and competitiveness to have a career in, for example, the business world; and the other is that if teachers did not lack so much in intelligence and imagination they would either take up more lucrative and challenging positions in business or pursue their academic interests to far more esoteric levels in the academe.

Both are empirical speculations and neither makes much sense. There is no reason to suppose that the ideals of helping professions, namely a genuine desire to assist others, in this case to help them learn, are not present in a majority of teachers. And even if it were true that

teachers are less competitive, etc., and that for many lower middle-class children teaching presents an opportunity for noncompetitive social-class mobility, it would not follow that teachers are not able to stick to decisions or are lacking in any other affective abilities important to teaching. Equally, it is patently false to say that intelligent people always enter the business world or the academe. Both require talents of intellect, but so does teaching. An unfavourable and unfair comparison is often made between the highly successful businessman and a rather humdrum unimaginative teacher. The creative and resourceful teacher is often overlooked. It is often forgotten as well that intelligence goes along with interests; and so just as there are intelligent people who are interested in business problems or research, there are intelligent people who are interested in teaching.

(b) The Conditions of Knowledge and Access to Data

The value of particular knowledge to curriculum decisions is dependent upon the nature of the decision to be made, i.e. the object-of-decision and the context in which and the activity in or about which the decision is being made. To assess the value of teachers' knowledge we must therefore consider it in conjuction with the decisions in question. We will relate general types of knowledge, i.e. theoretical descriptions of alternatives and justifications and pragmatic outcomes of proposed alternatives, in light of the principles that make it valuable, i.e. centrality, depth and breadth, to the areas of knowledge in which teachers are supposedly initiated (e.g. knowledge of the disciplines and teaching methodology), and all of this to the specific categories of objects-of-decision in activities and contexts.

(i) Macro activity decisions

Macro activities, e.g. football, chess and schooling, are composed of programmes - description of the overall point of the activity, principles of governance, main objectives, etc. - and procedures - rules of performance. The programme and procedures must be consistent with one another. Such activities are composed of subordinate or micro activities, each having a programme and set of procedures of its own but which are consistent with those of the macro activity. The macro activity of chess, for example, would be composed of such micro activities as 'castling'. The latter has its own programme and procedures but they have no meaningful existence independent of the former. Schooling, a more pertinent example, has the characteristic structure, and is a macro

activity which means that its programme, procedures and constituent micro activities are not always the same, unlike chess which is unchanging (for the most part). There are different versions of schooling. Grammar schools, comprehensives and free schools do not have the same programmes, procedures or micro activities (though there is considerable similarity, otherwise they would not all be recognizable as schools). The fact of this 'openness' of schooling gives rise to an important macro activity problem, namely determining the structure and composition of schooling. Should Grammar School X turn comprehensive? Should Comprehensive School Y change one of its central principles, e.g. should it endeavour to shape its curriculum to the wants of the local community? Should Community A devise an alternative school - something unique? In relation to this sort of problem our question is: should teachers make the decisions, and if so, what part of the teaching profession, e.g. local teachers, national assemblies or whom?

If a teacher is epistemically superior to adult laymen, it is in virtue of a high level of education (usually a university degree), professional training (as in a teacher's college) and experience which is often under the scrutiny of colleagues, school inspectors and school heads. In past years, particularly in Britain, primary school teachers have not usually been university educated; though this is somewhat improved in Britain and significantly so in North America. (In Alberta, Canada, for instance, a four year B.Ed. or its equivalent is now mandatory for teaching in either private or state supported schools.) In consequence of this, and the rather dubious value of scrutiny by colleagues, etc., claims of epistemic superiority should be moderate. Perhaps the strongest claim would be that some of the lost ground could be made up by collective teacher decision-making. That is, where some individuals are lacking in education or experience, a collectivity such as the teaching staff of a school or the teachers within an education authority might lessen the deficiency. Either a majority may be well educated and experienced or those who are well educated and experienced may have an uplifting influence, epistemically speaking. The latter point is similar to the 'accumulated input' notion discussed in the previous chapter. Its principal failing when applied to community membership was that the prospects for uplifting the laymen where not encouraging because they would lack understanding in the areas of knowledge that form the backdrop for curriculum decision-making (e.g. subject knowledge, knowledge of educational theory and teaching methodology). This seems less worrisome in the case of teachers whose professional occupation is to attend to such matters.

Yet, unaided teachers ought not to make certain macro decisions. Whether Grammar School X ought to go comprehensive or Community A ought to adopt some version of a freeschool or a comprehensive school are questions not ultimately answerable by appeals to competence. The choice is between forms of schooling; and we have no universal educational criterion (in virtue of which the teaching profession could be competent) to show one as more 'educational' than the other. Granted, we share a vague concept. We could rule as unsatisfactory alternatives that, for example, had no significant connections with knowledge and understanding. We could say they were not even schools. In addition we could eliminate school alternatives whose programmes and procedures were internally inconsistent or procedures antithetical to sound pedagogical practice. But problems would still remain. A grammar school supporter might suggest that students acquire more academic competence than in a comprehensive. The reply might be that comprehensive schools are more egalitarian. What objectively demonstrable criterion do we use in ranking these principles? Free schools might be said to foster broad knowledge, and comprehensives in-depth. Which is preferable? There may be a powerful criterion to act as the justifying principle for such decisions which we simply have not yet discovered. But until we do, and someone becomes competent in its use, macro decisions of this sort must be left to the body politic (whether national or local is another matter).[1]

But note: it is the final resolution of the matter that requires a value judgment which is beyond studied competence. It is the selection of a justifying principle and the application of it that goes beyond competence. But the suggestion and clarification of central principles seems very much the sort of activity which sociology, psychology, history and, most especially, philosophy of education are concerned with. Presumably the experts in relevant fields would be most competent. Equally, alternatives must be stated. Theoretical descriptions, the characterizations of the alternatives, fall surely within the range of the relevant educational expert; and to some extent this is true of teachers. The educational theorist might give an accurate ideal

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[1] John White has argued that the state ought to have control of such matters. See 'Teacher Accountability and School Autonomy' in Proceedings of the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain, Vol. X, July 1976, pp. 58-78. I argued against White and in favour of more localized control in Journal of Philosophy of Education, Vol. 12, 1978, pp. 63-8.

characterization of comprehensive schooling, while experienced teachers could describe them as they actually exist. The point is that in practice comprehensive schools may manifest themselves in a form somewhat different than an ideal type. So a community, for example, in deciding whether to adopt a policy of comprehensive or free schooling would surely want the alternatives realistically described. Some combination of teachers and experts, on the face of it, would seem to maximize competence. Then there is the matter of pragmatic outcomes: prediction of the consequences of implementing the various alternatives. Since pragmatic outcomes are heavily dependent upon conceptual and material contexts, and these are local, teachers, especially local teachers, would be best able to gather the relevant data. (At this point we see an application of the condition of competence we have named 'adequate access to data'.) It would seem, therefore, that even choices between alternative macro activities are largely products of competent deliberation, and those in which teachers have an important part. And when we say 'teachers' and wonder if this is to mean local or more centralized groups, the answer must surely be that it depends upon the particular teachers we are dealing with. The decision-making arrangement should be whatever maximizes their competence, and this will vary between locations and times since the teaching profession is not completely uniform. What is sought is a suitable marriage between two strengths: access to contextual data and knowledge of subject, teaching and theory. In some regions where the epistemic credentials are strong, the more decentralized the better since that would maximize the 'access' advantage. Where local teachers are not so epistemically well endowed, greater centralization (though not too much so as to lose the advantage of 'access') would broaden the base from which decision-making knowledge could be drawn.

There is another important type of macro activity decision. New types of schooling are conceived, and existent types are revised. In each there is determination of either programme or procedures (hence specification of constituent micro activities), and sometimes both. In the category of alternative schools, newly imagined descriptions, principles and objectives comprise the programme, and specific rules to determine school activities are newly devised or dramatically rearranged. This is an example of the former. Of the latter, an example would be the changing of a comprehensive school to create a different version of the same thing. With certain additions to the programme and adjustments to the procedures a community school could be created. If, to the traditional comprehensive programme were added the principle

that the school should determine and service community needs, certain new micro activities would be added, and the consequence would be a new version of comprehensive schooling.

In large measure, the teaching profession is competent to handle these matters. Again it is the argument from knowledge and experience. It is, perhaps, at its strongest in decisions about procedures because teachers are usually better trained to teach and deal with a particular subject area (more the former than the latter in North America and vice versa in Britain, at least in the case of secondary school teachers) than they are knowledgeable and speculative about the macro activity as a whole. The level of question would be: 'Assuming that procedures must conform to programme and principles x, y and z, should there be a procedural rule that makes subject a compulsory or student activity b forbidden?'. Modern teacher training frequently involves itself to some extent with dealing in these matters. So the teaching profession, if so trained, would be a reasonable choice as decision-maker. Now decentralized control is desirable for reasons of access to contextual knowledge; but too much localization can have a disadvantage in some matters. For example, if the question of making subject a compulsory came up in a particular school, the teacher who specializes in a might be rather tempted to look more at the benefits of having his or her subject assured a place on the curriculum than at the degree to which it is consistent with the principles of that type of schooling or the best interests of the children. So it might be wise not to leave the matter solely to the teacher of a. A more objective decision-making base, say the whole staff of the school (or whatever seems appropriate, consistent with both objectivity and 'access') might maximize competence. In closing, it might be suggested that consultation by teachers, local or otherwise, with institutional experts on theoretical matters and with students, parents and members of the community where contextual information is sought, could provide depth and breadth to the store of teacher knowledge.

Concerning programme decisions, decisions about the principles of a schooling type or indeed the imagining of a new type of schooling, the teaching profession has not so strong a case. In favour of teachers, one might point out that teacher's colleges usually ensure that their students study in the areas of history, sociology or philosophy of education, areas which investigate the nature of schooling; hence, to some extent prepare student teachers for this sort of concern. In addition, for those individuals who are imaginative enough to conceive alternative forms of schooling, the school, any school, could provide a milieu in

which to think creatively. The 'situation' of schooling, the intimation of principles, purposes, alternatives and practical problems to be overcome, would be ever in view. Granted, one can be creatively stymied if buried in one's 'situation'. But for those not buried by it, the familiarity can favourably contrast with the ignorance of those who are ever on the outside. This being true, members of the teaching profession can reasonably be seen as capable of making creative programme decisions.

What has to be remembered though is that our question is not 'who ought to have the final say about implementing alternative schools?'. This would reduce to the first of our macro activity questions. Rather, it is 'who is competent to conceive of the alternatives?'. Now what we have shown about teachers so far is that they are in a position to think creatively and they have at least some of the relevant knowledge. But having the opportunity to think creatively is not actually doing it. Some people are more creative than others. Entry into the teaching profession, through a teacher training college or otherwise, does not guarantee that one will be able to create alternative schools, conceptually speaking. And alternative conceptions of schooling have not in the past generally been created by a collectivity of teachers. They have come from individuals such as Pestalozzi, Herbart, Froebel, Homer, Lane and A.S. Neill who were not only teachers but inventive thinkers besides. It would be a mistake therefore to say that teachers, qua teachers, are exceptional decision-makers in this category. Indeed, it would seem rather more likely that experts in educational foundations subjects who stayed closely in contact with schools would have a better combination of knowledge and creative intelligence (cf. Dewey and Skinner).

In sum, one could say about teachers and macro activity decisions that their obvious competence lies in applications of two strengths: knowledge and experience and access to contextual details. The combination suggests decentralization; but only to the point where more is lost in knowledge (in view of weaknesses of some teachers) than is gained in data. And competence aligns with the type of macro decision being made. With regard to procedures, teachers seem more competent than others. This is not obviously so, however, in the creations of macro activity alternatives. Finally, selections between competing macro activities are not, ultimately, to be determined by appeal to the principle of competence. Interim steps, though, such as clarification of alternatives and justifications are matters of competence. Educational experts are probably best suited to propose theoretical alternatives,

but teachers, in view of their access to data are best able to complement this with specification of pragmatic outcomes.

(ii) Micro activity decisions

If one procedural rule of a macro activity is that all students at a particular level must study geography, then there is a micro activity, the study of geography, that must be decided about. What is its programme and procedures to be? Programme decisions would be the like of: 'What general description is to be given the geography course (or courses)?' That is: 'Is it primarily to inform students about topographical features of specified regions?' or 'Is it to inform and demonstrate interrelations between climate, soil, vegetation, population, land use, industries and politics?'. Once the general description has been decided there are, then, questions about aims. If the second description was adopted one could then ask if the central aim is to make the student aware of these interrelations in specified regions or to develop in him the ability to discern relations of this sort in any region he investigates. Then: 'To this end, what behavioural objectives are planned?'. Further: 'What is the purpose of studying geography thus described?'. Procedural decisions, i.e. decisions about the rules and directives of the micro activity of (in our example) 'the study of geography', would include: determination of the specific topics within the general area of interrelations between climate, soil, vegetation, etc. and politics; and it would include considerations of the order in which the topics are to be introduced and the methods of introduction (e.g. lecture, discussion, discovery, etc.).

Predictably, one line of argument is that in a micro activity involving the teaching of a subject (though there are other kinds of micro activity such as the administration of the school in non curriculum matters) specialist teachers in the subject areas would have both relevant academic and professional training and access to contextual data. This is quite plausible; though its force lessens in instances where teachers are not university educated in their subject. Fortunately, the educational level of teachers has risen quite considerably in recent years. However, where academic or professional training is weak, there should be consultation with those more qualified, such as other specialist teachers or relevant experts. (Mandatory consultation is less desirable than discretionary consultation for reasons mentioned in the previous chapter; but if it can be demonstrated that marginally qualified teachers do not avail themselves of these outside sources, it seems reasonable that some sort of government guidelines should require it. A justification for

this could be formulated in terms of fulfillment of the competence conditions, most especially the knowledge condition.)

In addition, there is the question of fulfillment of the access condition and whether this is best done by allowing each classroom teacher to make his or her own micro activity decisions or whether there should be at least some collective deliberation, for example, by all of the geography teachers in the school. Strictly from the standpoint of access it would seem likely that classroom teachers should make their own choices, but two points intervene. First, access must balance with knowledge; and it is likely, though obviously not of logical necessity, that combined professional opinion will increase the latter. Of course too much decentralization would be at the expense of the former. Second, since the micro activity (of the study of geography) might involve more than one teacher as would be the case if a secondary school had a geography department, with several members and course offerings, who wanted to have a coherent (geography) programme in total, a collective decision-making arrangement would seem called for, if not on grounds of competence then of democracy, unless one party was quite clearly epistemically superior to the others.

Barring the second problem and returning to the first: the balancing of access and knowledge would depend in part on the actual micro decision. Whereas determining the geography programme for a school demands considerable subject understanding (that a marginally qualified student might not have), some procedural decisions are relatively less esoteric. For example, when deciding how to teach geography there could arise the question of how long the lessons should take. This would depend largely upon the attention span of the children, given the room temperature, time of day and ability of the teacher to hold interest. Local information is clearly the most important factor; hence the matter is best decided by the classroom teacher.

To this point we have been discussing decisions <u>about</u> micro activities: these are questions that determine what the activity is going to be. There remains to be considered another group of questions: decisions <u>within</u> the micro activity. That is, questions arise in application of programme and procedures. If the programme of 'the study of geography' is to involve an investigation of the interrelations between climate, soil, vegetation, etc. and politics, and procedurally it has been established that England, Scotland, France, Spain and Italy will be investigated with this in mind and in the stated order; then if a decision has to be made as to which country to study on a given occasion, the choice among the alternatives (i.e. England, etc.) can be made by application

of the procedural rule 'the order of countries to be studied will be....' as a justifying principle. Generally stated, within an activity decisions can be made by applications of rules (or principles of the programme where there are not explicit rules).

Epistemic competence would require, for the most part, a thorough understanding of the programme and procedures of the micro activity; that in combination with knowledge of the material and contextual contexts. Since it is in the former that teachers are professionally trained, and the latter to which they have direct access; it seems likely that local teacher decision-making would be desirable. The ideal combination of knowledge and access would depend, as usual, on the extent of the teacher's understanding of the rules, etc. So, whether classroom teachers are given control over all such matters, or have certain restrictions, should be contingent upon circumstances. For surely there are some rule applications that are very difficult and on which the teacher, if not required, should consult with colleagues or experts. Evaluating students' work and classroom misbehaviour would be of this sort. For example, if the rules concerning evaluation of geography projects are very general and a student, instead of submitting the expected essay, produces a scale model of some description with a taperecorded explanation, a decision must be made as to whether or not this accords with the evaluation rules. A teacher might be wise to consult with, for example, the department head. Rules of behaviour may require that severe cases be expelled from class for some period of time. Does a particular indiscretion warrant expulsion or not? Again, competent decision-making might hinge on discretionary consultation.

(c) The Argument from Experience

There is a second line of argument that I would now like to offer in support of teachers having control of decision-making both about and within micro activities of schooling where curriculum is concerned. It is an application of an argument made in an earlier chapter that connects competence in a particular activity to an understanding of the activity. It is the <u>argument from experience</u>.

(i) <u>Experience and significance</u>

In an activity (schooling, or any other), one acts on the basis of prior decisions - selections among alternatives. Even habitual acts were decided about at one time. And one does not decide to do just anything;

one's alternatives are restricted, suggested, guided and influenced by the nature of the activity. Some of this function is carried out by formal rules. When serving, the tennis player must toss and hit the ball above his head. This is the rule. He must stand behind the base line. He must hit over the net and into the diagonally opposite service court. These are rules. The net must be three feet high, the court one hundred and fifty-six feet long, etc. More rules. It is an informal rule, though, that guides the server when he serves with spin on the ball and to the opponent's backhand. It is a bit of putative strategy that belongs to the game of tennis. That one should serve deep into the service court so as to make it difficult for the opponent to move to the net is an informal rule - some strategy - but a bit more subtle.

One could tell a very long story about informal rules: about the layer upon layer of increasingly subtle directives. But this would be to repeat the discussion of an earlier chapter. Suffice it to say, the informal and formal rules are the structural component of an activity that we have called procedures; and a participant may know these in greater or less breadth, depth and centrality. The competent tennis player would know a great range of strategies; he would understand precisely and profoundly; and he would know which range applied, and exactly when each applied.

Procedures derive from (i.e. must be consistent with) the programme: the programme - the description, principles and purposes - unifies the procedures and gives them external justification. The procedures - the formal and informal rules - make sense and are understood by the participants in light of the programme. In tennis, service rules and strategies of service are understood as part of a game called tennis, a game which can be described, etc. as such-and-such.

Procedures, what to do and when, can be many and various; and they are understood in their number and range, as part of the activity, in virtue of one's understanding of the particular sort of activity that it is - of the programme. So, the better one understands the programme - the greater one's depth, breadth and centrality of understanding - the richer and more plentiful are the suggestions, intimations and nuances that justify existent procedural directives and generate new (and consistent) ones.

The better one understands the programme, the more subtle and profound one's conception, the better one understands the procedures. But there is more. Deciding just what to do and exactly the right moment in which to do it is dependent upon more than an abstract conception of the the game. It is dependent too upon understanding the context. For the

tennis player to see the strategic advantage of putting top-spin on the ball under certain circumstances he must understand how tennis players usually think when in those circumstances - i.e. what they anticipate from the opponent and how they think they ought to react to a ball with top-spin. It is partly in virtue of knowing this, the conceptual context, that they see as advantageous, and as a directive rule, the proposal of top-spin. The other important part is understanding the material context. As a rule it is advantageous to use top-spin under the given circumstances because one knows that players with certain physical attributes have at their disposal this or that way of physically reacting, and so on clay or grass courts a ball with top-spin under bounce thus or so. And the application of this rule on any given occasion depends upon the contextual details on this occasion.

The quality of decisions made within an activity, and the competence of the decision-maker, are tied to knowledge of the activity- knowledge of the structure of the activity, its programme and procedures, and the material and conceptual contexts. This much has been established (here or in an earlier chapter). How, then, does one acquire this knowledge? How does one come to satisfy this knowledge condition of competence? Through experience?

Tennis could be learned about, at least in part, indirectly from a book or a tennis player. Once could read or be told that tennis is a racquet game played in a court by two or four persons who drive a ball back and forth over a low net. Learning the programme of tennis could begin with such a description and could proceed to accounts of purposes, aims, principles and so forth. Procedures likewise. Indeed, it seems logically possible that a neophyte could be told everything about the programme, procedures and contexts of tennis - everything at least that could be put into propositional form. It could be learned by imagining each described situation. Of course it would be tortuous. every single detail would need to be explained. For if our neophyte had never seen a tennis serve, every single action, each movement of the body, racquet and ball, would have to be described in such detail that the learner could see it through his mind's eye. Now confirmation would of course be denied to the learner if he were never actually to witness a tennis match. For without this he would never know whether or not his imaginings were accurate. (Strictly speaking, this is not a problem for his claim 'to know' tennis: we do, after all, make knowledge claims about propositions of which we have only indirect evidence. We accept historical propositions on the basis of testimony and scientific claims about protons and black holes which are impossible to observe

directly.)

However, serious doubts can be raised about the quality of the learner's understanding. Even if he could repeat on demand each and every proposition he had been told, i.e. the entire corpus of previously stated propositions about tennis, it is not at all obvious that the meanings he would attach to them from his imaginings would be accurate or very rich. For the descriptions of, for example, a tennis serve, would be in concepts he otherwise understood. To speak of tossing the ball overhead and hitting it with the racquet, one must have some notion of tossing a ball. If he had no prior experience of 'tossing', this concept would have to be explained by reference to others. The more remote his experience from racquet games the more difficult the explanation and description. And where notions such as tossing have to be subdivided into other notions for purposes of explanation, they would have to be perfectly restructured in the imagination of the learner to form the conceptualization in question. If it is logically possible to comprehend the full significance of these propositions, and I am not sure that it is, it is certainly unlikely.

This difficulty is partly remedial. Observation of a tennis match would lend significance to the propositions. Details omitted from the description could be thus filled in; and the explanations of tennis service would then have a more concrete backdrop. However, the full significance of propositions could not, logically could not, be thereby gleaned.

In the cases of some propositions, <u>experience</u> in the activities and actions to which they refer is necessary to understanding more fully their significance. That a tennis ball hit with top-spin is difficult to return, is a proposition which is not fully comprehensible to someone who has not actually tried to return such shots. That the American tennis player, Roscoe Tanner, can serve 140 miles per hour is a statistic which lacks an important dimension of meaning, according to those who have had to face it. That running long distances, playing hockey, doing philosophy and painting can all be enjoyable are things which no amount of description can make one appreciate in the richest sense. The point is <u>not</u> that descriptions will never be sufficient to make one <u>feel</u> as the participant would feel. It is not a psychological point. It is that understanding is a matter of degree, i.e. one can understand more or less, and that understanding past a certain level is impossible without actual experience.[2]

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[2]Michael Oakeshott in <u>Rationalism and Politics</u>. (London: Methuen, 1962), pp. 7-12 distinguishes between technical and practical knowledge. The former is propositional knowledge and the latter is of the sort I am referring to here.

A second point about experience and understanding is that not only must one experience some things in order to fully understand them, but one must have considerable prior understanding in order to fully experience something. The experience of Roscoe Tanner's 140 mile per hour tennis serve would be very different for an individual with a rudimentary knowledge of tennis than for one with no knowledge whatsoever. The latter would experience it as, perhaps, an act of aggression, intimidation or under some description of a spherical object being hit at one as part of a game where neither this act nor the game are clearly understood. The former, on the other hand, would experience it as a tennis serve: a clearly understood action which has certain qualitative characteristics which are part of the micro activity of serving, within the macro activity of tennis. What makes it possible to comprehend this action as a tennis serve with these characteristics, i.e. possible to be <u>experienced as</u> a tennis serve, is an understanding of the micro activity, macro activity and relation between the two. In other words, the action is only recognizable and of significance in the light of the activities of which it is a part: the meaning of the former derives from the latter. Now, once the action is understood in this way, once it is given this preliminary recognizance, it turns back on itself and enriches one's understanding of the initial proposition: 'Roscoe Tanner can serve 140 miles per hour.' The point is, to fully understand some things in or about an activity they must be experienced. But the logical possibility of comprehending the experience, of experiencing it as a such-and-such, is dependent upon some prior understanding of the activity of which it is a part. Of course, this mutual dependence does not mean that we are forever prevented from understanding the activity because we need direct experience of it but cannot get it without understanding. Rather, it is a full, or in-depth, understanding that depends upon direct experience. (By 'full' and 'in-depth' here, I do not mean logically complete. For there always would exist the logical possibility of further dimensions or aspects to be understood.)

John White in <u>Towards a Compulsory Curriculum</u> (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), Chapter Three, argues that certain subjects such as mathematics and philosophy cannot be understood without first having some initiation into the concepts that are peculiar to those activities or subjects. His is an argument from experience. My claim differs from his. I think concepts and subjects or activities which are made up of them can be understood more and less fully. 'Significance' is the key to this. So, where he would say that experience is necessary to understand a concept, I would explain why this is so - in terms of significance.

(ii) Experience and teachers

The experience argument favouring teacher decision-making within and about micro activities draws on this analysis. Decision-making depends upon knowledge of the activity; in some cases in-depth knowledge depends upon direct experience; therefore, decision-making in some cases depends upon direct experience. Furthermore, since direct experience is only meaningful in light of some understanding of the activity, those best able to benefit from experience are those who are familiar with the activity. Consequently, from the standpoint of knowledge, those most competent in decision-making will be those who have some knowledge of the activity and who have direct experience of it. My contention is that, for many micro activity decisions, teachers will be most competent because of having both relevant knowledge and experience.

Returning to the earlier considered matter of a school deciding about the programme and procedures of a geography course (a decision about a micro activity), a question arises about the importance of experience to knowledge of alternatives and justifying principles. In making a programme decision about a geography course, suppose two alternative aims between which there must be a choice are (a) teach the skills of geographical investigation without a systematic exposition of the climate, population, land use etc. of any particular country (b) teach the details of climate, etc. of a particular country without emphasis on the means employed by the geographer to obtain this information. In (a) the aim is to teach students to be geographers, if not very sophisticated ones, and in (b) the aim is to teach students about the geography of a particular country.

Now a choice among alternatives involves consideration of pragmatic outcomes. What will likely happen if (a) is chosen, or (b)? This gives rise to the questions: Will students be sufficiently unmotivated by either of these to make teaching it unlikely to succeed? Will they be so motivated to learn one rather than the other that it would be, from the pragmatic standpoint vastly preferable? Are the students who will take this course in an adequate state of readiness to learn, i.e. do they have the prerequisite concepts? There are other relevant questions, of course; but just taking these it seems reasonable to wonder if, for instance, the prospects of studying the geography of some country of little immediate concern to them are so boring to the students in question (bearing in mind their intelligence social background, etc.) that teaching it would be hopeless - a waste of time. Against this, children might be thrilled by the very idea of learning to be geographers. But then geographical investigation involves prior scientific understandings

of the relations between vegetation, soil and climate and between surface land formations and subterrestrial formations and about cartography - schematic depiction of land masses. Will the students in question have this prior scientific knowledge and will they have the conceptual development to comprehend cartographic representations? Answers to these questions have a significant bearing on the desirability of the alternatives (on the basis of 'ought implies can'); and the information needed to answer them depends upon having 'adequate access to data' - i.e. being close enough to the students to determine their probable reactions. But having access is only part of the story. Access places one in a position to get the information; but I am suggesting that a direct <u>experience</u> of the situation would give added significance to the meaning of what is otherwise only a superficial observation. On the motivational point, for example, the proposition that students seem resistant to the study of one country's geography is not valuable unless the <u>significance</u> of the resistance is understood - i.e. unless the qualitative aspects of the resistance - its nature, intensity and probable duration - can be discerned. This is a matter of judgment: an ability to sense the quality of the resistance based on knowledge of the activity of the study of geography and experience with students and their attitudes toward the study of geography. By understanding the structural components of the activity of the study of geography - i.e. the programme and procedures - a state of affairs to which the resistance of students can have application is adumbrated. Indeed it would be nonsense to speak of resistance unless it were resistance to something. Then to know that students are resistant to that version of the activity, i.e. to that programme, is a very important piece of information in deciding whether or not to adopt that version of the activity. To have had direct experience with the particular students in question and the rejection of the course now proposed would greatly assist in answering the questions: What is the significance of this resistance? How important is it to the study of this course? But to have experience with <u>these</u> students in relation to <u>this</u> course would be ideal. Usually we have to settle for 'these' students or students like them, and 'this' course or one that is similar. Still, it is the direct contact that informs best, even under these circumstances. And on the point about assessing readiness to learn, e.g. prior conceptual development: having direct experience with the children enables one to determine the significance of such things as a poor understanding of the scientific foundations of 'learning to be a geographer'. This is not to say that direct experience will inform everyone. A solid understanding of the activity

is a necessary prerequisite. Nor is it to say that experience is sufficient even with activity knowledge. Rather it is to say that experience is at least one of the necessary conditions in grasping the significance of circumstances that have a direct bearing upon decision-making.

Decisions about micro activity procedures (e.g. about content and methods of presentation) can be shown to have much the same connection with experience. Student motivation and readiness have an important bearing on the topics one selects to teach and on the methods. The significance of assertions about such things as motivation and readiness to the practicability of alternative topics and methods is, as I maintained with respect to programme decisions, logically dependent for a 'full' accounting upon experience. For instance, having selected a geography programme, there remain procedural matters such as the directives that guide content. 'In the study of British geography students must concentrate on England'. Or: 'Concentration must be on Scotland'. Which? In part, the answer is dependent upon the pragmatic outcomes of each alternative. And experience is vital to assertaining this. Equally, directives that guide the methods of study, e.g. lecture, discovery, etc. depend upon the students and the type of course.

Now I want to say something rather more general about that in which experience is necessary for a fuller understanding. First, activities are complex interrelations among procedures, and between them and the programme. To <u>understand the activity</u> it is necessary to understand the structural interrelations. To understand any part of the structure (as a structural element of a particular activity) it is necessary to understand the whole structure. Experience is necessary for a full understanding in both. That in tennis one should follow the procedure of lobbing the ball over the head of the opponent who has come close to the net, is something which cannot be seen as important by anyone who does not understand the relation between the rule and the programme of tennis, namely preventing the opponent from having clear opportunities to stroke the ball so it cannot be returned. But someone who has experienced the devastating consequences of not managing to do this is in a better position to see that the procedure is not just important but is 'extremely' important. The qualitative nature of 'extremely' important here is simply not comprehensible independent of experience. Similarly, the extent to which the procedural directive 'All philosophy students must study formal logic' is important to the programme of the study of philosophy is, at a very sophisticated level of understanding, understood only by those who actually do philosophy. For it is only by doing philosophy that one comes to sense the <u>value</u> of understanding logic in

this circumstance and in that, or inapplicability of the symbolism in this sort of inquiry and in that. So, to restate the point, one could never have a sophisticated understanding of an activity without actually having experienced it. Second, the pragmatic outcomes of selecting any alternative are dependent to some degree on an assessment of the conceptual and material contexts: the aggregate of participants' conceptual schemes and the economic, social, psychological, etc. circumstances in which the activity takes place. The points in our geography illustrations about conceptual prerequisites and motivation were conceptual and material context issues, respectively. Since experience has been shown vital to an understanding in these areas, no more need be said.

Experience is therefore the key to (i.e. a necessary but not sufficient condition for) discerning the significance of relations between structural components of an activity and of actions and events taking place within the activity. It is through experience that we apprehend significance. Since part of what we mean by understanding an activity is seeing the significance of its internal relations and actions and events that occur within, it follows that experience of and within an activity is necessary to understanding. Furthermore, since understanding an activity is essential to an activity decision, experience is essential to activity decisions. My claim with regard to teachers is that in virtue of experience (and of course prerequisite knowledge) their understanding of many micro activities is superior to that of parents, institutional experts, etc., and they are, in consequence, likely to be better decision-makers. Of course, more needs to be said about to whom it is that 'teachers' refers.

New teachers have very little direct experience. Teachers who have taught one subject do not necessarily have experience in another subject. The geography teacher, for example, may know very little about the teaching of mathematics. Teachers who have taught in one context (material and conceptual) may understand little of another context. For example, the circumstances of an affluent private school are quite different than those of a state school in an impoverished and rundown community. Clearly, therefore, the argument from experience requires judicious application.

Micro activity programme decisions such as about the nature of a geography course, and procedure decisions such as about the means of study, e.g. individual discovery learning projects versus classroom lecture-discussions, could profit from the direct experience of geography teachers and those other teachers who had had the prospective geography

students in other courses. The former could have an experience-enriched understanding of the activity of the study of geography, and the latter, some insight, through experience, into discernment of context, something obviously relevant to assessing pragmatic outcomes of alternatives. Some manner of combining experiences in a decision-making arrangement would surely be ideal. What form this should take, however, is whatever best unites knowledge of activity with knowledge (hence experience) of context. Should micro decisions in this case, therefore, be made by all members of the geography department as a group in order that 'accumulated input' be greatest? Should all teachers in the school be involved? Should only those teachers with direct experience of either geography of the prospective geography students have a say? I think the answer to these questions would properly vary from one school to another. An optimum balance of activity and context knowledge (informed through experience) might be reached in a small and particularly intimate school by all-teacher contribution. In another school, in which the geography teacher's strong suit is activity knowledge rather than context - i.e. she knows the content very well but does have difficulty getting to know the students, their likes and dislikes etc., and deciding how to deal with them, it might be preferable for there to be a consultative arrangement with teachers who have had the prospective students in past years. And, another factor that has a bearing is the type of decision. Some procedural matters, such as 'which teaching technique ought to be used with a particular group of inattentive students?' requires activity knowledge of course, but a great deal more direct experience of context, i.e. the students. In this case the classroom teacher would be in a position to glean information of the most important kind; and his experience would, prima facie, take precedence.

Clearly, the argument from experience supports decentralized decision-making. It shows that the knowledge condition of competence is best fulfilled by those who, among other things, have direct experience of the activity and context of the object-of-decision. The support for decentralization, however, is not uncompromizing. 'Knowledge' is the condition that must be fulfilled and although experience is a necessary prerequisite in practical decision-making, it is not always the case that we have experienced decision-makers and experience; and even when we do experience is not always enough. Perhaps such an argument demonstrates that if we are to deny entitlement to the decentralized decision-maker on grounds of competence there must be provided strong reasons.

3. Conclusion

The argument for teachers as decision-makers is simply this. Central to the entitlement of a decision-maker in a practical activity is competence in decision-making. To be competent one must be able to choose, relative to an object-of-decision, an alternative course of action (or range of them) on the basis of a justifying principle(s). The alternative must be fully stated: a statement of alternative includes a theoretical description and consideration of pragmatic outcomes. Furthermore, the more central these alternatives and justifying principles to the object-of-decision, and the greater the depth and breadth of their presentation, the better for the quality of decision. Knowledge of alternatives and justifications is dependent upon knowledge of the activity in which or about which the decision is being made, and it is dependent upon understanding of the conceptual and material context of the activity. Knowledge, as a condition of competence, has two companion conditions. Decision-makers must have cognitive and affective abilities, e.g. foresight and confidence, in order to conceive of alternatives and justification and to stick to difficult decisions even in the face of emotional pressures. And, decision-makers must have access to contextual information.

The problem we have had to face has been 'Who best fulfills these conditions of competence?'. The reasonable possibilities seemed to be students themselves, parents, educational (institutional) experts, teachers or some combination of all of these. Students, in our investigation, were found quite unable to fulfill either the abilities or the knowledge condition, and so it was determined that their part in curriculum decision-making should be quite minor. The case against the more senior students would, of course, not be as strong. Parents were not rejected outright. There is no obvious problem in their fulfillment of the abilities condition and the conditions of both knowledge and access could, conceivably, be satisfied by some parents since the class 'parents' does not exclude individuals who may well have quite adequate knowledge credentials (e.g. parents who are also teachers), and some types of schooling such as community schooling invite parents into the classrooms and thereby give them access to relevant data about context. Still, taking the class 'parents' as a whole, it does seem rather generous, to say the least, to attribute to them a sophisticated knowledge of a school programme or its procedures, matters which are normally seen by the educational community as requiring a considerable amount of study (e.g. teacher education and research scholarship). Consequently, control of

most areas of curriculum should not be in the hands of parents - unless of course it could be demonstrated that in a particular community the parents were unusually well qualified. However, there is an exception. With regard to macro level decisions in which a choice is to be made between types of schooling - as when a community decides which sort of schooling they wish to support or a parent decides which sort of school to send his or her child to - there is no reason to believe that the final choice ought to be made by he who can boast of the strongest epistemic credentials. Granted the alternatives need to be adumbrated, the justifying principles clarified and the actual choice made consistent with the principles which allegedly justify it, but the choice of justifying principle among the range, and application of it, is something which, if based upon competence solely, would require a moral expert. Since the very idea of a moral expert is highly questionable, it would seem that such matters are ultimately decisions based upon preference. So, if we assume that parents have a prima facie right to governance of their children, and we further assume that they are not incompetent choosers, it would follow that they should make such macro activity decisions. It should be noted, though, that my argument is less in favour of parents and more an admission that entitlement to such decisions cannot be settled ultimately by appeal to competence. Parents, it was also argued, could well be competent to decide about certain micro activity matters which do not require specialized knowledge or professional training. As for experts, the next alternative decision-maker we considered, it was claimed that in many macro and micro concerns they could provide theoretical descriptions of alternatives and clarify justifying principles, not make the final decisions. For, if competent decision-making depends upon a full understanding of alternatives, and that in turn requires knowledge of the pragmatic outcomes (i.e. what usually happens when such a proposal is implemented and what is likely to happen in this case); and if determining pragmatic outcomes requires access to data, then if experts do not have it, they will not be competent. Since we were considering only those experts who could be characterized as institutional, that is, by definition, without access to data, they would not be competent. Doubts were also expressed about institutional experts on grounds that they tend to standardize proposals, something which does not take account of contextual variations. Finally, various participatory arrangements were rejected. With some exceptions, it was felt that the knowledge condition would not be satisfied even with the abundance of contributions that group decision-making would entail. Proponents of collective decision-making often mistakenly

see quantity as opposed to quality of information as contributing to competence.

Those most likely to satisfy the conditions of competence are teachers - in some cases individual classroom teachers and in some cases the combined knowledge of the profession. The mix of knowledge required to make curriculum decisions is a mix between knowledge of the schooling activity and its context and the broad areas of knowledge that form the backdrop to the range of macro and micro decisions of curriculum. Particularly in the case of the former, the significance of information thus acquired cannot be apprehended in its richest sense without the recipient having direct experience. Since teachers do have more of this experience they (whether 'they' here refers to individual teachers or groups of them depends upon sort of experience we are talking about) at least fulfill a precondition of understanding the schooling activity in this rich, or full, sense. This applies not only to understanding activities but context as well.

The plausibility of the case for teachers would surely be lost if too much was claimed. In consequence, heavy qualifications have been given. It would be tedious to see them stated again: suffice it to say that just as the epistemic credentials of parents and experts can change over time or be different in different locations, so it is that the complexion of the teaching profession is neither static or uniform. Those who are competent in one time and place may not be in others; and vice versa. Therefore, the question 'Who is most competent to control curriculum?' is always open. What endures are the conditions of competence; they must be applied and reapplied. On this application, teachers, for some decisions the profession as a whole and others individual teachers or in small groups, appear to be those most competent to control the curriculum.

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